
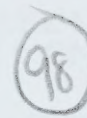


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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 18 April 2016

Lundi 18 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 18 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 18 avril 2016

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Joining us soon in the members' gallery are friends of Wallaceburg's Sydenham hospital: Shirley Roebuck, Mary Lou Van Daele, Mary Agnes Bogaert, Jennifer Bowen, Victoria Scott, Lisa Medd, Rex Isaac, Jeff Wesley and Lori Turner. I'd like to welcome these people from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Today, page Harry Blackwell's mom, Sally Blackwell, is here, and she's joined today by her friend Sarah Hefford from Oakville as well. Please give them a warm welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to welcome my friends from Richmond Hill, Mr. Hassan Kiasat, Dr. Mohammadtaghi Salehian, and Ms. Aghdas Pirayesh, who are sitting in the members' gallery. Mr. Speaker, please join me in welcoming them.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: From my riding of Barrie, I would like to welcome Jocelyn Leworthy and her mother, Angel. They are here today for the Be a Donor campaign.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: We have a delegation here today from the town of Ingersoll: Mayor Ted Comiskey, Bryan Smith and Brian Donlevy. They're here to present to committee this afternoon, and they're here to enjoy question period this morning.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to introduce Ronnie Gavsie, the president and CEO of the Trillium Gift of Life Network. As well, we have Leslie Kirke and her son, Sully Rafi, with us today.

Tonight, by the way, is the Trillium Gift of Life Network reception at 5:30 in the dining room. I encourage all members in this House to attend. We also have a photo on the staircase after question period.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I invite everyone in the House to join me in welcoming page Amelia Naidoo's mother, Leila Puran, and father, Mervin Naidoo. They'll be in the public gallery this morning. I issue my welcome as well as the entire House's welcome.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Young Madeline Loewith, one of our pages, has some special guests here today that I'd like to welcome to the Legislative Assembly. Mother Jennifer Howe is here, father Ben Loewith is here, grandparents Ron and Carol Howe are here, and grand-

parents Carl Loewith and Sandra Katz are here to support the young page. We welcome you all to the Legislative Assembly this morning.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to welcome the grade 10 students from Dr. Norman Bethune who are just walking into the visitors' gallery, and the teachers, Ms. Alison Rimell as well as Glynn Williams. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: C'est un plaisir aujourd'hui d'avoir des invités. Un d'entre eux va recevoir l'Ordre de la Pléiade cet après-midi : M. Louis Patry, qui est avec nous dans la galerie avec son épouse Nicole, son amie Nicole Fortier, et un autre ami, Mike Nakashoji. Aussi, mon personnel—Anick Tremblay—qui sont avec nous dans la galerie. Bienvenue.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to welcome the family of Chandise Nelson, who is our page captain today. I'd like to ask everyone to welcome Hentrose Nelson, Chris Nelson, Cahlia Nelson and Clareth McCallum to Queen's Park.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I am extremely happy today to have the opportunity to introduce my eldest daughter, who is here with us in the members' gallery: Talia Salome Amaral Del Duca, who is eight years old and is sitting right back there.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm proud to introduce in the Legislature Devon Moir. She's a bright student at Dartmouth College, my alma mater. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have delegations from Wallaceburg and Walpole Island First Nation coming. They are stuck in security right now, but they are making their way. That's Shirley Roebuck, Mary Lou Van Daele, Mary Agnes Bogaert, Jennifer Bowen, Victoria Scott, Lisa Medd, Rex Isaac, Jeff Wesley and Lori Turner, and Natalie Mehra and Kim Johnston from the Ontario Health Coalition.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Just one more addition: I'd like to ask everyone to welcome a member of my staff, Gillian Rowatt. I don't think she's here just yet, but she will be joining us in question period.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, please join me in wishing a happy birthday to page Sabrina Arcuri. Today is her birthday.

WEARING OF BUTTONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Point of order: I'm seeking unanimous consent to wear a button commemorating Vaisakhi. As well, we're celebrating Vaisakhi at Queen's Park. I'd

like to welcome some members of the Sikh community who are here. We're having prayer from 1 o'clock to 3 o'clock in the government caucus room and a reception following that from 5 o'clock to 7 o'clock. I'd like to encourage members who can attend to please attend.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Brampton West is seeking unanimous consent to wear the button and follow his invitation to all members. Do we agree? Agreed.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Burlington on a point of order.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear ribbons in recognition of Trillium Gift of Life's Be a Donor campaign.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Burlington is seeking unanimous consent to wear the ribbons for Trillium Gift of Life. Do we agree? Agreed.

1040

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Steve Clark: Before we start, on behalf of our party, we just want to express to the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure our wish for a speedy recovery. We're thinking of him and his family this morning at question period.

Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Why is the Premier allowing the Minister of Government and Consumer Services to appoint Liberal friends and donors from his own riding to government boards within his ministry?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There is an absolutely arm's-length process whereby public appointments take place, Mr. Speaker, and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister, be helpful, please. Thank you.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In fact, since we've been in office, we have actually depoliticized those processes much more than when we came into office. There's arm's-length decision-making that takes place.

I think that if the member opposite looks across all of the boards, agencies and commissions, he will see that there are representatives, first of all, from across the province and from all political stripes and no political stripes: people who have been appointed because of their skill base and because of their ability to do the job at hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: I have a briefing note from the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services dated last Thursday. It's entitled, "Public Appointments: Historical Advice to Minister and Minister's Office." It was prepared by an acting senior policy adviser and it was approved by a director and an assistant deputy minister. It's clear that ministry officials are concerned that the minister is overriding their advice and recommendations and making public appointments that run against the ministry's directive.

How long has the Premier allowed her ministers to appoint their friends and donors to government boards against the advice of senior civil servants?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That hasn't been the case, Mr. Speaker. That's not how appointments are made. As I say, there is a process in place. I suggest that, if the member has that memo, he look at what the process is, because the process would be laid out in that memo.

The process has been depoliticized. There's a skills-based process that is undertaken. As I say, if the member opposite looks across the boards, agencies and commissions, he will see representatives from many different backgrounds, from many different parts of the province: people who had connections to all parties and to no parties.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Again, back to the Premier: The briefing note was written because the minister was seeking to appoint a real estate agent from Sault Ste. Marie to the Real Estate Council of Ontario.

The note says, "There is concern within the [ministry] that appointment of an additional regulated professional to the board, rather than someone outside of the industry, is contrary to the practice of balancing interests on the board."

The issue note continued: "candidate selection package prepared ... identified four suitable candidates." However, "the minister's office has advised that they will be seeking to appoint a member" outside of the recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain why the minister is being allowed to ignore the advice of senior civil servants and to appoint someone not appropriate for the Real Estate Council of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I haven't seen this memo. I'm sure that the member opposite will send it across the floor to me. I think, from what he has said, it's quite clear that the process is in place. My understanding is that this person that he's referencing has not been appointed and will not be appointed.

I think that the process that is laid out in the note confirms the fact—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please finish, Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, as I said earlier, if you look across the appointments made by this government, you will see members from all different party

stripes and people who have no connection with political parties, because there is a process in place that assesses the abilities of potential appointees and makes decisions based on those recommendations.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Jim McDonell: My question is to the Premier. It appears that senior ministry officials are of the opinion that her Minister of Government and Consumer Services is acting in a conflict of interest. An email from the assistant deputy minister read, "We all know it has been until very recently a long-standing government practice and policy to appoint people from outside the regulated profession to ... boards."

The assistant deputy minister added, "I believe the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services needs to give the best advice on why this practice may not be optimal."

Mr. Speaker, is the reason why it is not optimal because it appears the minister is breaching practice and ignoring consumers' interest by appointing individuals with ties to him and the Liberal Party?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've answered this question a couple of times now. There is a process in place that assesses the merits of people who come forward for potential appointments. The fact that the civil service will, from time to time, lay out a process, remind us what a process is, and make it clear what the process is—from my perspective, that's the job of the civil service. The job of the civil service is to give us advice and for us to act on that advice.

We set up the arm's-length process. Look across government and you will see appointments from all political stripes and no political stripes, because there is an arm's-length, depoliticized process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Back to the Premier: Of the five new appointments made by her minister during his mandate, four were against public service advice. Out of those four, three of them are his constituents, and the fourth happens to be a former Liberal candidate.

Now the minister is at it again: about to override extensive advice, break with the practice of appointing consumer advocates to public boards, and pass on four qualified candidates in an attempt to appoint another constituent of his.

Mr. Speaker, this is simply not acceptable. Why is the Premier allowing her ministers to create a culture of unacceptable public appointments patronage?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The public appointments process is open, accessible and transparent. All applicants apply through the Public Appointments Secretariat. That is the practice and that is what everyone has to do. They can apply online, they can get information about the process and they can see upcoming vacancies.

I would just say that this level of transparency has been introduced as a result of changes we have made because we believe that the practices that have gone on in

the past where patronage was the rule—that is not what we support. We support a merit-based process. That's why there are people from all across the political spectrum who have been appointed to agencies, commissions and boards as part of this government's tenure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Back to the Premier: It is clear from the memo that senior staff are so concerned about the minister's conflict of interest that they've laid it out in writing. That is why, today, I filed a complaint with the Integrity Commissioner.

Until this government's recent slew of scandals, precedent dictated that ministers would step aside while under investigation. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier ask the minister to temporarily step aside—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order. Start the clock.

Please finish.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier ask the minister to temporarily step aside and suspend any pending public appointments until the investigation is complete?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm quite sure, as the members opposite look across government and look at the agencies and boards and commissions, they see people from many different backgrounds, including our recent appointment of the Patient Ombudsman. I'm sure that Christine Elliott, we could all agree, is a fine example of someone who has the skills and the background and who can do that job in a very good way.

1050

Those appointments have nothing to do with partisanship. They have to do with merit; they have to do with ability. That's why the processes that we have put in place remove the partisanship from the decisions. The fact that a civil servant has laid out the process—that's the job of civil servants: to make sure that we continuously remind ourselves about what the processes are and follow those processes. But our government put them in place, Mr. Speaker, and they are at arm's length from the political process.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. When Mike Harris decided to rewrite election rules without public consultation, without consensus and without public input, the Liberals called that, rightly so, anti-democratic and unfair. However, when the Liberals do it, as they're doing now, they think it's fine, that it's absolutely problem-free.

Does the Premier really believe that any leader with a majority can rewrite election rules at their pleasure?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here's what I believe, Mr. Speaker. Last year, in June, I said that we needed to make changes to the political donation and fundraising rules. We are moving on that. I think that there is a fair degree of consensus about the changes that need to be made. I think that there's a degree of consensus around the banning of corporate and union donations. I think that there's consensus around at least having a discussion about a public subsidy or a per-vote allowance, Mr. Speaker.

Those are the kinds of discussions that we will have when the draft legislation goes out for consultation after first reading. There will be ample opportunity during the summer and into the fall, after first reading and after second reading. I think that that is how the democratic process, by definition, works, and I hope that the third party and the people whom they ask to come to committee will do that and give us input.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Let's do a little bit of compare and contrast, shall we? When Bill Davis wanted to change the election rules, he struck and created a panel. That panel included nominees from political parties. It included nonpartisan members from the law society. It included the Chief Electoral Officer. And it included an independent chair appointed by the Lieutenant Governor.

Now, let's contrast that with what Mike Harris did. When Mike Harris wanted to change election rules, he did so from the back rooms of the Premier's office.

My question, Mr. Speaker, is this: Is the Premier seeking to learn from Bill Davis or from Mike Harris?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There has been a lot of change since 1975, when the rules were put in place, Mr. Speaker. I think what we've seen is—I was actually alive in 1975 and I know—that the rules were very different and, in many cases, non-existent. The fact is that, over time, there have been more rules put in place. There has been a much brighter light shone on the practices around political donations.

As I have said, I think that there is a fair degree of consensus about where we need to go now. If we look at where the federal parties have gone and we look at other jurisdictions in Canada, we can see that there are some templates that we can use. That's what we're doing in terms of drafting the legislation. I still look forward to getting input from the opposition parties, but there will be ample opportunity for consultation, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The question was a little bit unfair. With the sell-off of Hydro One, it's pretty clear that the Liberal government isn't just trying to copy Mike Harris; they're seeking to outdo him.

The Premier is sending a message to Ontarians that it's normal for one party to rewrite election rules. On Thursday, however, Democracy Watch, a democracy organization that seeks to uphold our democratic process, disagreed with the Premier and instead stated that a process should first and foremost be broad and con-

sensus-based. In addition, it should equally involve all political parties and it should draw from the broader civil society.

Does the Premier realize that her actions are setting a precedent that any leader with a majority can simply rewrite electoral rules at their own pleasure, which defies our best traditions and traditions elsewhere which say that election rules should be changed in an open, non-partisan, transparent and, above all, consensus-based process?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I find the comments from the member opposite such a demonstration of disregard and lack of understanding of how our democratic parliamentary system works. He's suggesting, by the argument he's presenting, that somehow the government or the Legislature should not be in the business of making laws. It just defies logic. I would think, given his legal training, that he would know some of the most basic premises of how the legislative system works.

In our Legislature, Speaker, as you would know, every member has a voice. There is a very robust committee process where changes to legislation could be made and where debates are taken. I'm finding it very odd that the NDP is spending more time talking about the process than the substance of what should be in the legislation—and we'd love to hear from them on that.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre.

Today, residents from Wallaceburg and Walpole Island First Nation are here. They're here to save their local hospital and keep their emergency department open. They've agreed to the 700-kilometre drive to Queen's Park because they refuse to let the Liberals close another hospital in southwestern Ontario—to close their hospital. They know full well that once the emergency department is gone, once the big blue "H" is gone from that building, so is their hospital.

Why won't the Premier do the right thing and stop any plan to close the emergency department and the Sydenham District Hospital in Wallaceburg?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to speak in the supplementary, but I understand that concern has been raised by the community because of some rumours about the potential closure of the emergency department at Sydenham District Hospital. I want to assure the community—and this is important—that there are no plans whatsoever to close the hospital's emergency department. Even that contention is not accurate.

I understand that when there are rumours in communities, that can cause some upheaval, but there is no truth to that rumour. There is no plan to close the hospital's emergency department.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker.

Interjection.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I said, "Thank you, Speaker."

The Premier needs to listen to the people of Wallaceburg and the people of Walpole Island First Nation. She needs to understand what cuts to health care mean to families in southwestern Ontario. The Wallaceburg Health Coalition is still very worried that those rumours will become reality, because this is what we have seen over and over in other communities. What will that mean? It will mean 20,000 people don't have access to emergency care without having to drive over an hour to an hour and a half.

After all the cuts to Wallaceburg hospital, if the emergency were to close, so would the hospital. This is not the only community that's facing these deep cuts; there are many others. Will the Premier stop cutting hospital services that families and communities depend on?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I too want to reassure the community that there are absolutely no plans to alter or close their emergency department. This is an issue where it is a rumour. It's been generated locally. In fact, the LHIN has never asked for or received any ideas for such a closure. The ministry has never been involved in discussions concerning a possible closure.

What it does is it points to the necessity that the local board of the local hospital and the alliance, which is comprised of more than one hospital in that area, work with their community, and that they are honest, open and transparent about what their aim is to provide the best-quality patient care.

There has been no discussion with the LHIN, no discussion with the ministry. This is purely a local issue. I hope and I implore the member opposite that she doesn't contribute to this rumour-mongering and get the people in the community even more anxious.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, you'll have to forgive those good people, but when they go around and see that 169 registered nurses were cut in Windsor; 136 staff were cut at St. Joe's in Hamilton; 18 nurses were cut at Bluewater in Sarnia; 68 jobs were gone from the hospital in Kitchener; beds closed and more than 120 full-time positions were cut in London; deep cuts at St. Thomas Elgin hospital—and that's only since January 1, 2016—it makes people really nervous.

1100

The good people of Wallaceburg and Walpole Island First Nation are worried that they could lose their hospital. They're also worried because of all of the service cuts happening in southwestern Ontario.

Why is the Premier cutting services in southwestern Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I find it really regrettable that the member opposite would clearly use this local rumour and exploit it for broader political purposes. The truth is that

we're providing, this year, an additional \$2 million to the alliance, which includes the Sydenham hospital. That's a 2% increase in their funding.

All that the people in the local community need to do is look down the road to Leamington—where we just announced an additional \$1.5 million to recruit three obstetricians, to keep that local obstetrics unit and that birthing centre open for the local community—or to Trenton. I was just in Trenton recently, where we are working with the local community.

I would suggest that instead of fearmongering, she should work with the local community to provide the best patient care.

We have no such plans. It's unfortunate that you're exploiting a rumour for your own political purposes.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is for the Premier. Over the past couple of weeks, we have seen the Liberals put forward an almost unprecedented number of amendments to their cap-and-trade bill. Now, with more than 70 Liberal amendments before the committee, it's clear the government is rewriting its own bill on the fly.

It's time for the Premier to explain why her signature piece of legislation is such a mess. Is it because she also chose to write the cap-and-trade bill on the back of a napkin at her kitchen table over the weekend, or is this just how she handles the rules for Ontario's democracy?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We've been consulting now for about the better part of two years on this, and we continue. This is one of the most complex pieces of legislation ever introduced into the Legislature. The amendments are largely technical, based on input from a variety of industries. As you may know, there's—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I've spoken at the London Chamber of Commerce, the Guelph Chamber of Commerce and the Mississauga chamber of commerce. There is very great support for cap-and-trade. As a matter of fact, there is great concern that the opposition—which, after every single amendment, is calling a 20-minute break—is causing destabilization in the discussion. Their lack of—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I stand, you sit.

I've got a list of about four names that I'm going to talk to, especially the person asking the question.

Supplementary.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back again to the Premier: We all agree that we need to address climate change, but that doesn't mean everyone must agree on the Liberals' flawed cap-and-trade scheme. It's obvious that Bill 172 was slapped together so that the Premier had a PR document before jetting off to Vancouver for an environmental photo op with Justin Trudeau.

But the result is haphazard, with loopholes big enough to drive a truck through. Funding decisions will be made in secret, taxpayers will receive no relief, and the Financial Accountability Officer will not have access to spending plans.

Speaker, will the Premier admit she has messed up, withdraw Bill 172 and begin developing a revenue-neutral plan that protects taxpayers?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I would invite anyone to look at what those amendments are, Mr. Speaker. They are advice from lawyers and from industry associations on very technical pieces that are not terribly consequential from a public policy perspective but are critical for the actual functioning of that. Many of those were representations at committee, and continue to be.

Why the opposition would filibuster over and over again for days, over technical requirements required by industry, is beyond me. The answer is because they don't actually support carbon pricing or climate change, because the two amendments that they introduced would delink us from California and Quebec and undermine investments in critical infrastructure, necessary for a successful—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. In 2010, the Premier, who was then the Minister of Transportation, ordered Metrolinx to take over the Union Pearson Express under the same flawed business model that had just been rejected as a money loser by the private sector. Instead of building affordable public transit in this corridor, the Premier ordered Metrolinx to build a luxury airport express service. Now we know that Metrolinx ignored and covered up seven ridership studies that showed the Union Pearson Express would actually lose money.

Did the government order Metrolinx to ignore and cover up these studies in order to push ahead with the flawed business model the Premier had demanded?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's very interesting, now that we've actually joined most of the world's major economic capitals in having a premium service to our airport—without the support of the opposition. This is also the same member who actually said that we should only electrify the Union Pearson Express. Now, the government is electrifying all nine lines providing 15-minute service—which they don't support because they can't identify financing. In our debates, we said to the third party that if they were just a little patient, it would make more economic sense to electrify the whole line for all folks, which is what we're now doing.

On the ridership issue, when we went to all-day GO service, we tried it on an experimental basis. We expected an 8% ridership; we've now got 30%. These

things take time to build ridership. Clearly, the party has no patience, no money and no support for infrastructure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is back to the Premier. Quite frankly, at no time have we said what the minister just asserted. In fact, the NDP has always called for the electrification of all lines. That's what we've done.

Back to the Premier with the question. The NDP has been trying for years to get the UPX ridership studies, but we've been blocked at every turn by Metrolinx and this government. It's clear to everyone that Metrolinx has been covering up for the bad decision made by this Premier to build a luxury train for Bay Street executives who, it turns out, don't even use it themselves. The dirty diesel train is still inaccessible to most of the people through whose communities it runs, but they must help subsidize the train—and this is staggering, Mr. Speaker—at about \$46 per rider, even at the reduced fares.

Why is Metrolinx building pet projects for the Premier and then covering up—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Now I'm going to ask the member to withdraw her last statement as she was sitting.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Okay, I withdraw. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You don't have a choice.

The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm kind of amused by the third party's double standard. They were big supporters of Transit City, as was I—a very good project. All the Transit City lines would have run at an operating loss for many years through low-income neighbourhoods until ridership built and land use changed. They had no problem subsidizing that. And yes, they actually singularly advocated for advancing the Union Pearson Express electrification ahead of the whole thing.

Now, I share the CN GO line, the CN main line—which is completely run on diesel trains that run about every five minutes on that line. I think my constituents and the constituents in the south end of her riding have the same right to clean air as people in the middle of the riding. We actually believe in a bigger vision, and we actually believe in making decisions that raise the capital—which they also have consistently opposed—to pay for massive electrification. I wish the member opposite would get a plan or at least stick to one line of argument.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Mr. Speaker, good morning. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Last Wednesday, the 2016 budget bill, Jobs for Today and Tomorrow, was passed in this House. In this vein, the budget includes investments to support and update

the province's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. These investments continue the transformation of Ontario's housing and homelessness system.

There are communities in my riding of Scarborough Southwest that are very high priority when it comes to housing, and my constituents welcome this news as it helps to enforce and reinvigorate the housing community in my riding. Our government recognized that we needed more affordable housing in Ontario and our government took action.

1110

My question to the minister is, in opposing the 2006 budget, with investments in affordable housing, what did the opposition vote against?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the member from Scarborough Southwest.

I was disappointed when the opposition voted against our budget for a number of reasons, but being very concerned about social and affordable housing, it was an attempt to deny Ontarians the important and very necessary investments our government was and is prepared to make. That includes \$178 million over three years to provide housing subsidies and benefits, the construction of 1,500 new supportive housing units, and improving access for over 4,000 families to services like counselling and dispensing medication.

Our government knows investment in supportive housing is important. I was proud to have this commitment endorsed when we passed our budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I know my constituents and many across the province welcome this \$178 million in new funding for the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. Supportive housing is certainly an important component of helping Ontarians realize their full potential.

Related to this, I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing as well as the minister responsible for poverty reduction are working hard on our government's plan to end chronic homelessness. I was pleased to see that the housing investments in the budget will support this plan and will make sure everyone has the support they need to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, through you, can the minister remind this House how these investments help accelerate our goal to end chronic homelessness?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd be delighted to. In voting against the budget, the opposition parties voted against important steps, ending our goal of assisting with chronic homelessness. That included voting against a \$45-million increase in CHPI funding and \$17 million to provide the portable housing benefit on a pilot basis to eventually support up to 3,000 survivors of domestic violence. Taken together, these investments will make an important difference in our work.

I'm also encouraged that the federal government has now committed in their own budget to working with us and matching some of our investments. I know that partnership between all levels of government will help

transform our housing system in this province, and it's great to see a federal government that finally gets it and wants to adopt a national housing strategy.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Michael Harris: Speaker, to the Premier: This weekend's Metrolinx bombshell took the wraps off countless reports dating back five years, warning again and again against the luxury fares that their government chose for what quickly became the UP ghost express.

There was the 2011 Northstar study showing half of the GTHA residents wouldn't pay more than \$17.50; a 2012 Steer Davies Gleave study showing drastic ridership drops as fares rise past \$20; and in 2014, we had Environics reporting that 50% of respondents considered \$12 fare good value.

Was it the instructions of the Premier or the Minister of Transportation to ignore the advice of government experts in choosing a \$27.50 luxury fare?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's a great pleasure to answer the question from the member opposite. The member may be aware that Metrolinx is an arm's-length organization with its own board and its own CEO. Part of the reason we created this is that we have other basic utilities—this is our GTHA—to make decisions and to weigh evidence. It's not the job of ourselves to second guess them. There's a good process in place and you have to have confidence that the ridership builds.

We know if they had been in power—as Dr. Phil says, previous behaviour is a good indicator of future behaviour—we would be at the end of cancelling the Eglinton, filling in the subway to Vaughan and to the university. We would see another 10 years of backfilling holes and cancelling projects, Mr. Speaker.

I would love for the member to stand up one day and demand we actually build something, rather than criticizing what we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Harris: Right. We all believe Metrolinx is arm's-length to your government. We all believe that.

Speaker, these newly revealed numbers further highlight the expensive and avoidable mess that their government steered the UP Express into. The transportation minister told us in committee, with regard to transit funding plans, "People ... expect that we won't make these decisions ... on the back of a napkin and that there will be evidence-based decisions."

Will the Premier explain, in the case of the UP Express fare-setting, when it came to evidence versus napkins, why was it that the napkin won out?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: First of all, these studies have been up on the website for a couple of years now. They're hardly new news. I can always predict, by picking up my paper in the morning, which seems to be the substitute for Tory caucus research, what the

questions are going to be. You can at least go “click, click” and get the facts yourself.

Second of all, Mr. Prichard—former chair of the Bank of Montreal, former publisher of the *Toronto Star*, former chancellor of a university and former head of Torys—is a very eminent, independent-thinking person, as is Bruce McCuaig, our president and CEO. We have an excellent management team and board there, who are making very good judgments and supporting the funding that we’re putting in and the government’s commitment.

This is the biggest investment in transit and public infrastructure since John Robarts was Premier of this province. I hope that the member opposite has some confidence in Metrolinx.

ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, you had an opportunity last week to go to Attawapiskat and see first-hand the situation there, as it affects a lot of people in that community when it comes to attempted suicide. I think you will agree with me that the response that you put forward is a good step forward, as far as the \$2 million you’ve announced. But the real issue here is that we do not have the types of services that we need in those communities permanently and organized in a way that is consistent with the values of First Nations people and being able to make sure that those systems function.

Is there a commitment on the part of your government to change the way that we deliver health services when it comes to mental health services, addiction services and others, so that it falls under an organization that is run and led by First Nations, so they themselves can be part of the solution?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: First of all, I want to acknowledge the member from the third party. Attawapiskat is a community within his riding, and I know that for many, many years he has been working with the local community in a respectful way and in true partnership to ensure that he does his part in ensuring that services are improving.

We were in Attawapiskat last week, Mr. Speaker, and we made the announcement of the \$2 million, which provides—in fact, they’re already on the ground—13 health care workers, four mental health workers, five nurses and other personnel who are hard at work. Part of it is providing relief to the overworked front-line health care workers in the hospital, but also providing that response to the immediate crisis.

I think, as the member alluded to, that we all agree that that is important at this particular moment in time, but it doesn’t take away from the necessity. I am happy to address his particular question with regard to a changing relationship.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think you will agree with me, Minister—and you’ve seen it first-hand along with your

colleague—that the system that’s designed by Queen’s Park, designed by the Ministry of Health and led by the LHINs out of Sudbury is not responding to the needs of that community.

What the community is asking for—and not just Attawapiskat, but the entire James Bay—is that we change the way that we deliver health services on the James Bay, so that we actually have an aboriginal organization that is funded by the Ministry of Health and follows their regulations, but is designed in such a way to be respectful of who the Mushkegowuk Cree people are, so that they have some control over how we deal with these issues within their community. Are you prepared to engage in that process?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: There’s not a lot of distance between myself and the member opposite on this issue. In fact, the Premier is meeting with the political confederacy this afternoon. I’ll be joining her for discussion about health concerns and that relationship going forward.

1120

With regard to the LHINs, quite frankly, our First Nations weren’t significantly or substantially involved when we created the LHINs, so we’ve created a separate process where we’re working in partnership with First Nations across the province to make sure we have a governance model, an approach that respects them, is culturally appropriate and meets their needs.

I think the member needs to acknowledge that there’s also a strong federal component to this as well. The three levels of government, along with local communities—so the federal government, provincial government and First Nations’ leadership at the political level. Of course, we all need to make sure that we’re focused on providing better health care to First Nations communities in this province.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, as you know, Ontario’s social assistance programs are critical to our government’s poverty reduction goals to support the most vulnerable members of society. Maintaining an effective social safety net is one part of our government’s broader efforts to reduce poverty and ensure that we have an inclusive society and economy. However, constituents in my riding of Barrie know that the system can sometimes be complex to navigate for those who need it.

In last week’s budget, our government announced an income security reform process. Can you tell me more about your ministry’s work to reform the income security system for vulnerable Ontarians?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much to the member from Barrie for the question. Part of my mandate as Minister of Community and Social Services is to reform social assistance. Over the past year, my ministry has had ongoing discussions with stakeholders, experts and those on the front line. They told us that it’s

important to expand reform to include aspects of the wider income security system.

We listened, and we will be engaging stakeholders in the coming year to develop an action plan for more comprehensive reform. The plan will be informed by client experiences and a basic income pilot project, among other things. We will also engage with First Nations, Inuit and Métis nations to ensure we have an inclusive process.

As we develop this action plan, we will continue to take important immediate steps to improve income security, such as ending the full clawback of child support from social assistance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you to the minister for sharing information about this important action plan to improve our income security system for vulnerable Ontarians. It's important that we reduce barriers to ensure that we have a fair, adequate and accessible income security system that is simpler for Ontarians who are facing challenges in their lives.

We know that some of those Ontarians facing challenges are single parents who receive social assistance for their children. Minister, you mentioned ending the clawback of child support for social assistance recipients. Can you please share more information about this important change to social assistance?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: We know that children in single-parent families are disproportionately and more profoundly affected by poverty. As part of our government's commitment to combatting child poverty, my ministry will be ending the full clawback of child support for social assistance recipients. If I may remind the House, this is a budget that the opposition voted against.

Currently, families receiving child support have their social assistance benefits reduced by the full amount of child support they receive. This means families on social assistance are no better off when they receive child support and the parent responsible for making payments may feel little incentive to pay.

By not supporting our 2016 budget, the opposition voted to keep these funds from families in need. What we know is that, thanks to this budget, families who receive child support will see a positive change by this time next year.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: A question to the Minister of Energy: Here we go again. Electricity rates will rise again on May 1, up to 18 cents a kilowatt hour, the fastest-rising rates anywhere in North America. We're being told it's because we conserved too much energy—just one more Liberal excuse after another.

The minister stated he was taking steps to bring rates down yet, since November, the average bill is up \$187 per year. He says he's helping. Well, I have a message to him from consumers: Your idea of help is just too painful. Please stop.

For the minister, it's just catchphrases and fun with numbers, but for people in this province, it's reaching the breaking point. The minister needs to stop with the rhetoric and commit to action. When will he actually do something concrete to address skyrocketing electricity rates before Ontario reaches the point of no return?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I'll provide some additional comments in the supplementary.

Ontario's residential electricity rates are and will remain competitive with similar jurisdictions in North America. When comparing the cost per kilowatt hour, Ontario's rates are lower than in many American cities, are significantly lower than electricity rates in European cities, and are competitive with some Canadian provinces.

The recent increase just announced—Ontario's 2.5% bill increase—is reasonable and stacks very competitively across our comparators. BC Hydro rates increased by 4% on April 1, 2016. Saskatchewan power rates increased by 5% in 2015. Manitoba Hydro applied for a rate increase of 3.95% as of April 1, 2016. Newfoundland Power Inc. applied for a rate increase of 3.6% for residential customers as of July 1, 2016, compared to Ontario's 2.5%.

Mr. Speaker, we're doing quite well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: With answers like that, he just doesn't understand the pain he's inflicting on people across this province. He's going around saying what a bargain people are getting for their electricity. Where did the minister get that idea? He did not get it from the single mother who has to make the choice of whether to heat or eat. He did not get it from the senior couple who freeze in the wintertime and are gasping to get their breath in the summertime because they can't afford the electricity to run their air conditioning. Electricity in this province is no bargain, and under this government, it has continued to get worse.

The first step the minister needs to take is to stop signing contracts for intermittent electricity that we clearly don't need. Will he do this? Or have those developers been just too generous at his Liberal Party fundraisers?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: As I just mentioned, our prices are competitive with most jurisdictions', notwithstanding that we've removed coal-burning generation, which almost all the others are doing. By completely eliminating dirty coal-fired generation in Ontario, our electricity system is now more than 90% emissions-free. Smog days in Ontario have gone from 53 in 2005 to zero in 2014, and Ontario is already living a cleaner future.

We also recognize that the price of electricity can be difficult for those who pay a higher share of their income towards their bill, particularly low-income families and seniors on fixed income. That's why we launched the OESP and removed the debt retirement charge on Janu-

ary 1 of this year, saving the average family more than \$430 annually.

We also know that bills can be even harder for families and seniors in rural and remote communities who heat with electricity or use medically assistive devices. That's why we doubled the monthly benefit these families can access, up to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Atikokan.

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, your ministry replaced the Jobs for Youth Program with the Youth Job Connection program. Over the past seven years, Waubetek Business Development Corp. has successfully been delivering the Jobs for Youth Program in the Manitoulin Island region. This program change has resulted in youth employment positions for at-risk aboriginal youth being reduced from 50 to four positions.

Will your government reverse the cancellation of this important Jobs for Youth Program, which has done so much to guide aboriginal youth in a positive direction?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I apologize to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for forgetting. I apologize.

Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member for his advocacy as well as for this question.

We believe, in the government, that all Ontarians, particularly youth from any background, should have access to the best training and education possible. That's why, under the leadership of this Premier, we have renewed our youth jobs strategy with \$250 million in investments.

This strategy has two components. One of them is the Youth Job Connection, which basically addresses the needs of those youth faced with multiple barriers, including aboriginal youth, newcomers, youth with disabilities and so on and so forth.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, we have been working very hard to make sure that our youth will have the training and the education they need so that they can contribute to our economy and be successful in their lives.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the minister: Over the past seven years, this program has enabled 420 aboriginal youth between the ages of 15 and 18 to be hired, trained and placed over that period. Their results have been outstanding, Minister: an increase in aboriginal youth in post-secondary from 62% to 91% in seven years. High-risk behaviours are curbed. They worked with aboriginal and non-aboriginal employers to bridge gaps of cultural relationships and understanding and contributed to the regional economy. After the program

ended, many of the youth were re-employed by their original employers.

We know that our First Nations children and youth receive less than equitable services when it comes to education and child welfare compared to other Canadian youth. Will your government take every step to support this programming that redresses these inequities?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, I want to thank the member for the question. Part of this youth jobs strategy is the Youth Job Link program, which includes providing training and education for youth from every background, from the age of 15 to 29.

Employment Ontario provides services through 320 locations across the province of Ontario, and of course aboriginal youth are no exception. We will make sure that every youth in the province of Ontario has access to the training and skills they need to be successful in their lives as well as to contribute to our economy.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. Speaker, when the Leader of the Opposition flip-flopped on climate change, we on this side of the House were delighted, because we thought he was bringing the climate change deniers into the 21st century.

However, it would appear that most of his caucus hasn't yet gotten that memo. Despite telling the media that there was practically universal support in the PC caucus, many still are doing their best to delay passage of our bill. On Friday, the PC critic of the environment called for an end—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Your policy question is?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Sorry? Oh. The critic called for an end to our cap-and-trade program. On this side of the House, we know that cap-and-trade is extremely important and the best method for us getting Ontario to reduce its greenhouse gases while simultaneously growing the economy. We are joining a global movement towards putting a price on carbon, and it's most effective to be an early adopter.

Speaker, would the minister please inform all members—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Time's up. A reminder: Questions are about the policy of the government.

Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, a year ago—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, second time. The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was about a year ago, as members may remember, that we announced that we had decided on cap-and-trade as

the carbon pricing mechanism for Ontario. As a matter of fact, I think this week is the first anniversary of that decision.

That was done after very detailed conversations with industry leaders, and it enjoys the support of everyone from the president of Intact Insurance in the financial sector to the Ontario Trucking Association to Don McCabe and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because it has three characteristics which the opposition opposed but business, the community, the government and environmental groups support:

(1) There's a cap and a cap decline rate. That means that a small number like \$17 or \$18 a tonne does the same amount which in another system would require a price four or five times higher than that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'll continue in my supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, you will. Supplementary?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you to the minister for his explanation and for his tireless advocacy on this extraordinarily important issue. His advocacy is so important, Speaker, because of the filibustering that we're seeing from the other side as it makes its way through clause-by-clause. They are demonstrating that they are very divided on this file and they are not at all serious about combatting climate change.

There are amendments that demonstrate that as well. It is not our government's policy, as their amendment would suggest, that we remove the sections that link cap-and-trade with other jurisdictions. Ontario firms, as a result, would lose access to low-cost reduction opportunities that may be available in other jurisdictions.

It's also not government policy to accept their amendments which would further restrict our investments in renewable energy. I've come to believe that the party fundamentally does not understand the threat of climate change and how to properly combat it.

Speaker, would the minister please inform the House what experts, stakeholders and those who are in the know are saying about this bill, specifically how its revenue could be spent to provide positive impacts for our economy?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's a good segue into the three characteristics you need in a carbon pricing system to be economically positive and to achieve greenhouse reductions, which is the other objective.

You need a cap decline rate. The revenue-neutral systems in other parts of the world—none of them are meeting their objectives. Their GHG emissions are going up. People who are using the model that the opposition is advocating for have seen two things: industries leave and GHG emissions go up. We know they're opposed to our system, but they seem to support a system that doesn't work.

The other reason for linking markets is that you need a large, stable market to keep prices down. In the opposition's mind, you'd have to have a price-only system

which would require a price four to five times higher than it would be in Ontario, Quebec, California, Japan or other places where this is working.

The third piece is, you need money. The trucking association, the farmers, banking, industry, insurance: All need us to provide the funding for low-carbon technology and fueling—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question this morning is to the Premier. Premier, councillors at the region of Niagara are currently investigating the Burgoyne Bridge replacement project in St. Catharines and events that led to the escalation of the cost of the project from an original price tag of \$45 million to a total cost now well over \$90 million.

The taxpayers of Ontario contributed \$18 million to this project through the Infrastructure Ontario program. Is the Premier satisfied that the monies flowed to this project by her government were properly and appropriately spent and accounted for?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I can tell you that partnerships with municipalities are many in this province because we are investing tens of billions of dollars in infrastructure around the province. There are parameters around those partnerships. There are accountability measures in terms of money that flows.

I will get the member opposite more information on this particular project. I don't have that information but I'm happy to get it for him.

What I can tell the member opposite is that the investments that we are making in infrastructure, which are a fundamental part of our plan for economic growth, are critical to the communities around this province that are in need of those investments if they are going to be able to thrive. I know that those investments are not investments that the opposition supports, but we know that investments in infrastructure bring business, draw jobs to Ontario and create jobs as that infrastructure is built.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: The Premier should also be aware that concerned Niagara region councillors have not only ordered Deloitte to do a value-for-money audit of this bridge project but that they've also formed a standing Burgoyne Bridge task force to look into it further.

The first phase of this independent audit was quite damning, so much so that the councillors are not only proceeding with a second value-for-money audit, but they have now started a process to do a full forensic audit of this joint federal, provincial and municipal project.

Is the Premier aware of the initial audit? And is she still content that Infrastructure Ontario dollars were all spent appropriately and that Ontario taxpayers got full value for their money on this important project?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, I will get more information for the member opposite on this specific issue, but I can tell the member opposite that as those processes are under way, we will obviously look at the recommendations. We'll look at the findings of those audit processes and we'll make sure that we pay close attention to any recommendations that flow from them.

As I said, there are very transparent and very clear rules in place for the investments that we're making in infrastructure. They are critical investments. They're critical to the economic viability and prosperity of municipalities, and they're critical to the overall economic viability and competitiveness of the province. We have not had support from the opposition on investments in infrastructure, but we can already see the importance of these investments as communities have new infrastructure and are drawing business to their communities.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Earlier this month, Western University mourned the loss of a student who took his own life, following the death by suicide of another Western student in November.

Speaker, there is a growing mental health crisis on college and university campuses. Western Student Health Services saw a 26% increase in the demand for mental health resources between 2013 and 2015. Since February of this year, more than 1,100 Western students have signed an online petition calling for improved student mental health services.

The Liberal government's approach to funding campus mental health on a project basis leaves too many Ontario college and university students without adequate mental health supports.

Will the minister commit now to providing long-term, dedicated and stable funding for on-campus mental health services?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member for that question. The health and well-being of students in our facilities, in our post-secondary institutions, those being universities, colleges or career colleges, are of prime importance for this government. That's why we have announced assistance to universities and colleges in order to come up with assistance to students.

For example, one of those programs in place is the Good2Talk program, which we announced last year, to make sure that students will have access 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year—every day, every moment—to assistance so that their well-being is met.

We will continue to work with our partners in the post-secondary education system, universities and colleges, to make sure that our students have the assistance that they will need to succeed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question period is over. The time for questions is completed.

There are no deferred votes.

This House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I'd like to introduce three guests who are on their way in. I'd like to introduce Jenny Gill, Jaskaranjit Singh and Balkaran Gill, who are all here to join us to celebrate Vaisakhi today. The CSA will be hosting a reception from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. in rooms 228 and 230. I encourage all members to come out and visit the reception.

Ms. Soo Wong: They haven't arrived yet, but I know they're coming to visit Queen's Park today. My constituents from the great riding of Scarborough–Agincourt will be visiting us: Hratch Aynedjian, as well as his friend Vahan Ajemian. I'm going to welcome them to Queen's Park in advance of their arrival.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SIKH HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Todd Smith: We welcome our Sikh friends to the Legislature again today. I'm very pleased to be able to celebrate Sikh Heritage Month in Ontario. In my four years as PC caucus outreach chair I've had the personal experience of getting to know first-hand the many contributions of Ontario's Sikh community. Many of those community members I now call close friends.

Canadians of Sikh heritage play a vital role in our society. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to take my wife and my two daughters along with me to a gurdwara in Brampton. My family and I were given an education in the tenets of the Sikh faith and the value of Sikh culture. We were welcomed with open arms. We had the opportunity to participate in their prayers and sample some food from the kitchen at the mission.

It was on that day I learned that a hungry person in the community is always given a meal from the kitchen of a Sikh temple. They're open 24 hours a day. The Sikh community is always there to help. It doesn't matter if you're a member of the Sikh community or someone rolling in off the street who needs help.

April was specifically chosen for Sikh Heritage Month given its importance for Sikhs, as it is in April that Sikh Canadians celebrate Vaisakhi, which marks the formalization of the Khalsa and the Sikh articles of faith. Sikh Heritage Month is an opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate our future generations and society at large about the important role that Sikh Canadians are playing in communities across Ontario.

I look forward to joining many of my Sikh friends again next weekend as tens of thousands of Sikhs gather at Nagar Kirtans, to walk from Exhibition Place to Nathan Phillips Square in downtown Toronto this coming

Sunday, and again the following weekend up in Malton as we celebrate the Khalsa Day Parade there.

Remarks in Punjabi.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Ms. Jennifer K. French: April is Be a Donor Month, in support of organ and tissue donation in Ontario. As the first flowers bloom on the front lawn here at Queen's Park, what better time than now to celebrate renewal and the gift of life?

As I look around the room, I imagine that many of our colleagues have been touched by organ donation, just as so many families across Ontario have. Last year, 1,086 individuals in Ontario received a life-saving organ transplant, 46 of whom were children or youth. That's over 1,000 families that will get to continue to spend time with a loved one they would otherwise have lost if it were not for the generosity of organ donors.

My family lost my aunt Kath a few years ago unexpectedly, and the fact that she was an organ donor gave us something to focus on in a time of such senseless loss. We were able to take heart in knowing that other families were so positively impacted by my aunt even after she was gone.

One organ donor can save eight lives. When you factor in family members, friends, co-workers and loved ones of those recipients, you realize that a single donation can touch thousands. In our family's time of loss it was comforting to know that my aunt had been able to give hope to so many others in their time of need. For those families, it meant a second chance.

So visit beadonor.ca, speak to your loved ones and consider registering. Like my aunt, I'm also an organ donor. I ask that you join me.

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. Mike Colle: I would like to stand here today to give praise to all of our Ontario farmers, especially our tomato farmers. As you know, as a result of the ketchup wars, Ontario farmers are now planting in bigger numbers than they ever did before because there is a huge international demand for locally grown Ontario tomatoes. People care—and the member from Essex knows this full well—passionately about locally grown vegetables. They care passionately about locally grown fruit. They care passionately about local jobs. That's why everybody stood in their place and said, "We support local jobs. We support the new expansion of ketchup production in Ontario because it means more jobs and more healthy local fruits and vegetables."

As you know, French's ketchup is now seeking to expand into a new bottling plant to meet the demand for ketchup. Also, Primo Foods, that old, venerable Italian company, believe it or not, is going to produce all-Canadian ketchup.

So more jobs, more ketchup, more tomatoes—everything is good on the farm in Ontario.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I am pleased to rise today to recognize April as Be a Donor Month, the time to celebrate organ and tissue donation and transplantation. Being a donor is an easy way for an individual to give back. It truly is giving the gift of life to another who needs it most.

I want to take a moment to recognize the efforts of Ontario Lions Clubs across Ontario, who are raising awareness for organ and tissue donor registration. I also want to recognize the great work taking place at the Trillium Gift of Life Network, which is working tirelessly to help give the gift of life. Last year, Trillium Gift of Life Network surpassed their registration goal by having more than 250,000 Ontarians register. Now there are approximately 3.4 million Ontarians registered to be a donor.

But there is still a lot of work that can be done. While there are 3.5 million Ontarians registered, there are still approximately 8.5 million eligible Ontarians who have not. Every registration makes a difference. One donor can save up to eight lives and enhance as many as 75 lives through tissue donations. There are still 1,600 Ontarians waiting for that gift of life, and sadly, one person dies every three days waiting for that transplant.

Anyone 16 years or older with an Ontario health card can register to be a donor. So please visit beadonor.ca, take the two minutes to register and give the gift of life, but make sure you share your wishes with your family.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Cindy Forster: Today, I want to thank 100 community members, environmental experts and academics who joined me for a biodiversity offsetting round table in my riding yesterday afternoon.

During the trade mission to China last fall, the Premier signed an MOU for a China-based company, GR Investment Group, to develop on over 13 acres of provincially significant and protected wetlands in the Niagara region, a majority of which fall in my riding. To circumvent wetland conservation laws, the government is proposing, through a white paper, a pilot project called biodiversity offsetting, where wetlands destroyed in this process will be re-created elsewhere. In principle, it sounds good, but the scientific evidence says otherwise. Worse, it's getting the go-ahead from the Liberal government—keen to see this pilot project for future investment by the Chinese in Ontario as a no-net-loss policy.

Mr. Speaker, call it what you will; we know that no-net-loss is another example of Liberal jargon, and my community is disturbed and troubled by the government's disregard for environmental priorities in my riding. We know that no-net-loss will have disastrous impacts on our ecosystem.

To be clear, development is an important part of the region's growth. We value jobs and development and we certainly value economic growth.

As legislators, we have an obligation to make sure the pursuit of development is always balanced with the protection of our ecosystems, especially those that are deemed provincially significant.

JOCELYN LEWORTHY

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: As this is the Trillium Gift of Life Network's Be a Donor Month, I would like to take this opportunity to tell the story of Jocelyn Leworthy from my riding of Barrie, who courageously volunteered to be a live organ donor at only 19 years old. A member of Jocelyn's family fell very ill and potentially in need of a transplant. While this person went on to make a full recovery on her own, the idea of being a live donor was still in Jocelyn's mind. In June, she began volunteering at SickKids, where she saw first-hand how illness impacted children and their families.

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Resolved to give a child a second chance, she began her workup at Toronto General Hospital's living donor program. After several months of screening and tests, she finally was scheduled for surgery this past October to donate the left lobe of her liver. She was not without fears, but knowing that what she was doing would help a child made it worth it. Afterwards, the doctor explained that her liver went to an infant and it worked beautifully. Jocelyn has peace of mind knowing that she was able to change a family's life for the better.

Speaker, 85% of Ontarians support organ donation, yet only 29% are actually registered. Over 1,500 people in this province are currently waiting for an organ transplant. It is both vital and easy to register at beadonor.ca. Everyone should find the courage that Jocelyn found to be a donor.

ONTARIO ONE CALL

Mr. Robert Bailey: April marks the unofficial beginning of the digging season in Canada. As such, I rise today to recognize April as Dig Safe Month.

Each digging season, underground infrastructure such as natural gas lines, electrical lines and telecommunication lines are jeopardized or damaged because of the failure to take a simple but important safety step: having locates completed before starting an excavation project.

Getting locates is now simpler than ever. The Ontario One Call system allows homeowners and contractors alike to click online or call for locates before they dig. This quick but important step can prevent injuries, avoid property damage and reduce the inconvenience of outages.

The provincial One Call system was created by the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, which I co-sponsored with my colleague the MPP from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek. The One Call system is available to take locate requests 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year. Already, Ontario One Call is taking over one million requests a year, 700,000

by the Web and over 300,000 by phone. It takes an average of five minutes to submit a request, whether you do it by telephone or online. Ontario One Call is very easy to use and is an effective tool that is offered free of charge. It takes a moment at the beginning of a project, but it can help avoid big problems down the road.

Remember, call or click before you dig.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I don't like having my cable cut, either.

SIKH HERITAGE MONTH

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I rise today to celebrate the harvest festival of Vaisakhi, which is also the founding of the Sikh community, known as the Khalsa, and the basic Sikh belief that is represented by the phrase "Ik Onkar," meaning "One God."

Sikhism was founded by the 10th guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, in 1699 with the introduction of the Panj Kakar, or the five Ks, which are the five articles of faith that Khalsa Sikhs wear at all times. He prayed for equality, truthfulness, tolerance, honesty, brotherhood and respect for all.

Sikhism is a major world religion with origins that trace back to the 15th century. Guru Nanak Dev Ji had initially laid the foundation for a distinct community that started Sikhism as a social revolution and faith based on principles of equality and social justice. The Sikh community is based on fundamentals including faith, unity and equality for all.

I personally believe in a valued fundamental of Sikhism close to my heart: Seva. It means selfless service completed as a community action that is done for the goodwill and the benefit of others. The concept of Seva, though, is more than all of these things: It is the very essence of Sikhism.

Sikh Canadians have lived in Ontario since the middle of the 20th century and represent a growing and dynamic population, making significant contributions to the growth and prosperity of Ontario. I'm proud to stand before you today as a Sikh Canadian and recognize the important contributions that Sikh Canadians have made to Ontario's social, economic, political and cultural fabric.

April has been chosen as Sikh Heritage Month, as it holds importance as we celebrate Vaisakhi this month. It provides an opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate our future generations and society at large about Sikh Canadians and the important role that they play in communities across Ontario.

The Sikh nation is a strong, vibrant and diverse group and trusted among the core of Canada's current political framework. This is a testament to the sacrifice, support and outreach of the Sikh nation.

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE ANNIVERSARY

Ms. Soo Wong: Today, I rise to recognize the 101st anniversary of the Armenian genocide. On April 24,

1915, the Ottoman Empire ordered the systematic massacre of thousands of Armenians in their historic homelands. This ethnic cleansing of Armenians during World War I is recognized as the first genocide of the 20th century. Recently, Pope Francis referred to the Armenian genocide as one of the “three massive and unprecedented tragedies” of the last century.

Canada has always taken an active role in supporting the Armenian people. During World War I, Sara Corning, a Nova Scotia nurse, helped to rescue over 5,000 Armenian orphans.

Ontario has a long history of supporting the Armenian people, beginning in the 1920s, by accepting 109 boys and 40 girls orphaned from the Armenian genocide. They're known as the Georgetown boys and girls.

Recently, the Ontario government accepted over 10,000 refugees into the province. Since 2014, the Armenian community of Toronto has sponsored approximately 2,300 Armenian refugees to Canada.

This past weekend, representatives from all levels of government attended the annual Armenian genocide commemoration organized by the Armenian Community Centre of Toronto. The commemoration honoured and remembered both the victims and survivors.

I want to thank the Armenian community for ensuring that the memory of the Armenian genocide is shared with future generations. On this annual remembrance, we need to renew our resolve to stand united for truth, justice and human rights, both at home and abroad.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Fedeli assumes ballot item number 44 and Mr. Brown assumes ballot item number 59.

PETITIONS

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services' Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

“Whereas the community of Markdale rallied to raise \$13 million on the promise they would get a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner.”

I support it, affix my name, and send it with page Cooper.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas there are an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 unpaid internships in Canada each year, depriving young people of economic opportunity and potentially displacing paid workers; and

“Whereas unpaid internships perpetuate poorer labour market outcomes for marginalized groups and those who cannot afford to participate; and

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Labour is not adequately enforcing existing laws on unpaid internships;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass” Bill 64, “the Protecting Interns and Creating a Learning Economy Act, 2015, which:

“(1) extends basic protections under the Employment Standards Act (ESA) to those currently excluded;

“(2) requires that posters with information about interns' rights in Ontario be conspicuously displayed in the workplace;

“(3) requires that employers provide interns with written notice about conditions of work, length of employment, hours of work, and job description, to be submitted to the ministry to enable the collection of data on internships; and

“(4) creates a system to allow anonymous and third-party complaints about unpaid internships.”

I totally support this petition, affix my name to it, and give to page Amelia to take to the table.

TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: Il me fait grand plaisir d'apporter à votre attention une pétition à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario.

« Attendu qu'il y a un besoin criant en infrastructure de transport routier dans la province de l'Ontario;

« Attendu que d'offrir différentes alternatives ou options dans le choix du mode de transport aux citoyens aide à réduire le nombre de voitures sur les routes;

« Attendu que les transports en commun contribuent à améliorer la qualité de vie des Ontariens ainsi qu'à préserver l'environnement;

« Attendu que les résidents d'Orléans et de l'est d'Ottawa ont besoin d'une plus grande infrastructure de transport;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

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« Soutenir le plan Faire progresser l'Ontario et la construction de la phase II du train léger sur rail (TLR), ce qui contribuera à répondre aux besoins criants en infrastructure de transport à Orléans, à l'est d'Ottawa et à travers la province. »

Il me fait un grand plaisir d'appuyer et d'inscrire mon nom à cette pétition et de la remettre à la page Lauren.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas a 61-year-old Alzheimer's patient was kept in a hospital ER for eight nights due to lack of beds;

"Whereas the crisis centre isn't set up to help patients whose needs are so great they need treatment in a psychiatric ward;

"Whereas the crisis centre only has five beds;

"Whereas none of the beds are high-needs beds;

"Whereas the number of people seeking help from the Alzheimer Society has soared 50% in two years;

"Whereas patients have the right to be treated with dignity and care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Immediately reform existing health care legislation and policies, and specifically provide emergency funding to increase staff and available beds in all ERs in Ontario;

"Provide immediate funding to increase number of long-term beds in SW Ontario;

"Provide immediate funding staff a team of experts to find ways to reduce violence among those with dementia in long-term care."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature to it.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition to recognize the Workers Day of Mourning.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the day of mourning is a day to remember and honour those who have been killed, injured or who suffered illness as a result of work-related incidents and to honour their families. It also serves as a day to protect the living by strengthening our commitment to health and safety in all workplaces in Ontario for the common goal of preventing further deaths and injuries from occurring in the workplace;

"Whereas a workers day of mourning is recognized in more than 100 countries around the world;

"Whereas 1,000 Canadian workers are killed on the job each year and hundreds of thousands more are injured or permanently disabled;

"Whereas it is expected that more than 90% of workplace deaths are preventable and raised awareness of this fact is necessary. Every worker is entitled to a safe work environment, free of preventable accidents, and that we, as a province, are committed to reaching such a goal;

"Whereas our MUSH sector (municipal, universities, schools and hospitals) as leaders in their communities are not doing enough to recognize and raise awareness of the seriousness of workplace injury and death;

"Whereas the flag symbolizes us as a province, and the lowered flag is a powerful symbol of our shared loss and respect, brings focus to the issues and symbolizes we are united on this front as a province at all levels, not divided;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support the workers of Ontario with swift passage of Bill 180, Workers Day of Mourning Act, 2016, that would require all publicly funded provincial and municipal buildings to lower their Canadian and Ontario flags on April 28 each year."

Speaker, I wholeheartedly support this and will send it to the desk with page Sabrina.

ELDER ABUSE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas today, there are more seniors 65 and over than children under the age of 15, both in Ontario and across Canada;

"Whereas there are currently more than two million seniors aged 65 and over—approximately 15% of the population and this number is expected to double in the next 25 years;

"Whereas Elder Abuse Ontario stated that between 40,000 and 200,000 seniors living in Ontario experienced or are experiencing elder abuse;

"Whereas research showed that abuse against seniors takes many forms and is often perpetrated by family members;

"Whereas financial and emotional abuse are the most frequently reported elder abuse cases;

"Whereas current Ontario legislation incorporates the Residents' Bill of Rights, mandates abuse prevention, investigation and reporting of seniors living in either long-term-care facilities or retirement homes;

"Whereas the majority of the seniors currently and in the future live in the community;

"Whereas Bill 148, if passed, will ensure seniors living in the community have the same protection and support as those seniors living in long-term-care facilities and retirement homes;

"Whereas Bill 148, if passed, will require regulated health professionals to report elder abuse or neglect to the public guardian and trustee office;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Ontario Legislative Assembly pass Bill 148, An Act to amend the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992 and the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, requiring health professionals to report any reasonable suspicion that a senior living in the community is being abused or neglected to the public guardian and trustee office."

I support the petition, Mr. Speaker, and I will give the petition to page Diluk.

HOME CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have petitions in support of VON personal support workers in Parry Sound that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas home care should be patient-centred and the priority is direct care, not profit; and

"Whereas the privatization of health services has led to the delivery of services that have become profit-driven rather than care-driven;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that home care be guided by the principle of caring for patients first, without regard for private profit-making."

I have signed this petition and I will give it to Chandise.

RURAL SCHOOLS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads:

"Whereas it is right for Ontario youth to be educated in their home communities;

"Whereas accessible schools that students can walk, bike or take a short ride to promote healthy lifestyles, a cleaner environment and emotional well-being;

"Whereas the economies of smaller rural towns are directly strengthened and vitalized by high schools in their own communities;

"Whereas community schools best serve special populations;

"Whereas rural high schools more than 15 km from the next high school should be considered eligible for enhanced top-up funding;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To direct support and resources to Ontario rural community schools, such as Harrow District High School, so as to provide and sustain accessible education for youth within their home communities, preserving and sustaining rural town culture that diversifies the fabric of the province of Ontario."

I wholeheartedly agree, affix my name and send it to the Clerks' table via page Amelia.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are critical transportation infrastructure needs for the province;

"Whereas giving people multiple avenues for their transportation needs takes cars off the road;

"Whereas public transit increases the quality of life for Ontarians and helps the environment;

"Whereas the constituents of Orléans and east Ottawa are in need of greater transportation infrastructure;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Support the Moving Ontario Forward plan and the Ottawa LRT phase II construction, which will help address the critical transportation infrastructure needs of Orléans, east Ottawa and the province of Ontario."

I support this petition, affix my signature to it and hand it to page Harry.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I am affixing my signature and giving it to page Jerry.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 163 provides for WSIB benefits for a select few first responders diagnosed with PTSD; and

"Whereas MCSCS probation and parole officers and MCYS probation officers have been specifically excluded from Bill 163, despite overwhelming evidence that these front-line officers are exposed to primary trauma, secondary trauma and vicarious trauma often resulting in PTSD diagnoses; and...

"Whereas the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services has neither programs for the prevention of PTSD nor employee assistance programs ... nor wellness programs that specifically support and treat those workers diagnosed with PTSD or like symptoms;

"We, the undersigned probation officers and probation and parole officers, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario shall include probation officers and probation and parole officers in presumptive PTSD legislation under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act and that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services creates programs aimed at PTSD prevention, along with employee assistance programs and wellness programs that address the mental health needs and occupational stressors related to trauma exposure."

I wholeheartedly agree and send the petition down with Aarbbi.

LUNG HEALTH

Mr. Yvan Baker: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children and youth living with asthma;

"Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

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"In the Ontario Lung Association report, *Your Lungs, Your Life*, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To allow for deputations on MPP Kathryn McGarry's private member's bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

"Once debated at committee, to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through the committee stage and back to the Legislature for third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage."

I'm proud to support this petition and give it to page Terry.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario families and businesses have seen their hydro costs more than triple under the Liberal government since 2003;

"Whereas the Liberal government's unaffordable Green Energy Act, the \$2 billion wasted on the smart meter program and the \$1.1 billion wasted on the cancelled gas plants will translate into a further 42% increase in hydro bills over five years;

"Whereas the Liberal government's elimination of the clean energy benefit will mean an average increase in hydro bills of \$137 per year;

"Whereas Liberal electricity policies have driven up costs and made living in Ontario less and less affordable and rendered our businesses less competitive;

"Whereas the Financial Accountability Officer confirmed that the fire sale of Hydro One will leave Ontario's budget worse off in the long-term;

"Whereas the planned syphoning off of the proceeds of the sale of Hydro One will leave ratepayers liable to pay the cost of retiring the utility's \$27-billion debt;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the fire sale of Ontario Hydro."

I agree—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Unfortunately, that concludes the time we have available this afternoon for petitions.

VISITORS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): A point of order, the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I ask for your indulgence to allow me to introduce my mom and dad to the Legislative Assembly. We have Dr. Jagtaran Singh Dhaliwal and my mom, Ms. Harmeet Kaur, as well as three friends of ours who are here. We have Dr. Navjeet Kaur Singh, Dr. Deeptej Singh and Dr. Gurcharan Singh—a family of doctors, with my family of doctors, who are only possible because of the support of my mom—that my dad's a doctor, as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Technically, that's not a point of order, but we're delighted to welcome your family and friends to the Legislature today.

Ms. Soo Wong: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough–Agincourt on a point of order.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to ask for your indulgence for a minute, to welcome my constituent Hratch Aynedjian, who is a prominent member of the Armenian community, and to thank him for all his hard work when it comes to the Armenian genocide and all his great work in the Armenian community. Thank you, and welcome to Queen's Park.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Technically, that's also not a point of order, but we're delighted, as I said, to welcome our guests to the Legislature this afternoon.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ALTERNATIVE FINANCIAL SERVICES
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2016LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
CONCERNANT LES SERVICES
FINANCIERS DE RECHANGE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 14, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 156, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to financial services / Projet de loi 156, Loi modifiant diverses lois concernant les services financiers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon in support of Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016.

Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I want to let the members know that I will be sharing my time with the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the member from Burlington and the member from Trinity–Spadina.

I also want to thank the minister for his leadership role in bringing forward this particular consumer protection legislation. Because of his previous legislation—I can vouch for how much it has protected consumers in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt: just simple things, such as the furnace issue. We all here in this chamber have heard about incidents involving our constituents and those door-to-door salespersons selling furnaces. In my office in Scarborough–Agincourt, numerous constituents have complained about this piece.

The proposed Bill 156, if passed, will provide further protection of Ontarians when it comes to the whole issue of debt.

In 2013, the ministry committed to reviewing payday loan legislation. Now, three years later, the minister is bringing legislation about this particular issue, because we are concerned. Recently, I remember hearing my colleagues in the city of Toronto raising concerns about the payday loan stores and how they're all over, proliferating in certain neighbourhoods.

The review of this particular legislation has expanded to include other high-cost alternative financial services, such as instalment plan loans, cheque cashing, rent-to-own services and debt collection. The broad public consultation informed us that the approach we need is to strengthen the protections for consumers of alternative financial services. We're not talking about the traditional banks; we're talking about stand-alone little stores in local neighbourhoods or in strip malls that are trying, supposedly, to help consumers, and especially those struggling with their debts.

The proposed legislation, if passed, will protect consumers in the following ways:

Consumers with debts in collection would benefit from debt collection rules that apply more broadly, including applying to debt purchasers.

Consumers cashing government cheques at alternative financial service providers would have more information and may benefit from a cap on the rate of cashing a government cheque. This is really important, particularly when low-income families using these types of services get gouged in terms of 25% or 30% fees to cash a government cheque, when in fact we are trying to let the consumers keep all their money, not take away from their money.

This legislation, if passed, will also ensure consumers using rent-to-own services would benefit from a grace period for late payments, and a right to reinstate the agreement under certain circumstances. I hear about this concern about rent-to-own—like, when you rent a car, down the road you might own the car afterwards. So it is very important that there is a grace period to help those

who may have one late payment, but not taking the vehicle from them.

Consumers using instalment loans would benefit from the cost control of certain fees, such as optional insurance. Again, this proposed legislation, if passed, will protect and support consumers, giving them more benefits, not less, and also giving them the option to buy insurance if they wish.

Consumers of payday loans would also have to wait seven days between loans, giving them more time to consider their options. This is no different to when we passed legislation when it comes to cellphone bills. Recently, we passed cellphone bill legislation to give especially young people some cooling-off period, like we do with door-to-door sales with the furnaces. There is a cooling-off period. It lets them have some time to reflect, some time to think over their contract, because, again, sometimes people get pressured into signing contracts that may not be agreeable to them. When they get home, then they think, "Oh, my God, what did I sign?" That reflection is important. That's what I said when I was a nursing professor: that students—in this case, consumers—have time to reflect on what they signed, and then they can change as they see fit.

Also, those who are borrowing money repeatedly would have a longer repayment period in certain circumstances. You know, life happens. Things happen. For instance, recently in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, one of the assistants to their local councillor passed away unexpectedly. So things happen. If you are a repeated borrower for loans, you will now have some support through this legislation, if passed.

The other piece of the legislation that is very, very important to my constituents is the fact that there is, in the explanatory note—I want to read it out loud for the audience watching at home: "The bill also permits the registrar to conduct inspections if he or she has reasonable grounds to believe that a person or an entity is acting as a lender or loan broker while not licensed." We hear concerns raised in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt: Who has the last say when it comes to this particular issue? Is it the minister? Is it the registrar? So now we're going to give additional resources and ammunition for the registrar.

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Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to today's debate, and I encourage my colleagues opposite to also join in, but more importantly, to take this bill to committee so that we have a public discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016.

Mr. Speaker, as the member from Scarborough–Agincourt has been telling us, this is a very important piece of legislation that is meant to protect not just consumers, but many of the most vulnerable consumers in this province: the people who depend on short-term cash loans or the

people who perhaps go through alternative financing for purchases that others might go through the banks or credit card companies for. Sometimes they might be recent immigrants. Sometimes they might be vulnerable seniors. Sometimes they might be people who have had difficulty securing a residence, securing ID, securing all those things that many of us take for granted in establishing our bona fides with a bank or other financial institution.

This legislation came about as a result of very extensive consultations with stakeholders across the province, especially many of those who are part of advocacy groups for vulnerable people. There was much discussion about whether payday loans should be banned outright, whether they should be eliminated. In fact, in the consultations the government undertook, what we found is that those groups that advocate for many of the most vulnerable have said that, perhaps unfortunately, it is an important part of the financial system in this province for many people. Those short-term payday-type loans are important to many people.

What this legislation will do is it will provide more controls on that system of payday loans. Most importantly, it's going to impose a seven-day wait period before somebody can have another payday loan. So for those people who, for whatever reasons, might feel that they need to take out additional loans, there's a period of time that they have to wait, and that potentially will assist them in managing their funds more efficiently but also in not finding themselves in dire circumstances where they simply continue adding to their debt. As part of that, there will be some additional opportunities for those payday loan providers to grant those people who borrowed those funds additional time to repay. It's also going to put some additional caveats on lenders, looking at who it is that they are offering loans to. These are all very important pieces of reforming this part of the financial services that Ontarians rely on.

The member for Scarborough–Agincourt also mentioned the many rent-to-own services that are offered to consumers in this province. Those also need to be better controlled, with a lot more information being offered to borrowers: knowing what their rights are, knowing what kind of lease they're signing, providing the opportunity for grace periods when lease payments can't be met for whatever legitimate reason, and the ability to get in and out of leases more easily.

These are very important measures to protect consumers. There are many more very important parts of this legislation that I'm sure my colleagues will touch on, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the member for Burlington.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to be part of this ongoing and very important conversation about Bill 156. It's a great opportunity to stand in the House, always on behalf of my constituents in Burlington, and to join my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore and my colleague from Scarborough–Agin-

court in this conversation. It's often the case in this place where we can disagree about certain elements of policy, but when it comes to protecting consumers, I know we're all standing in unison when it comes to protecting Ontarians from interests that would seek to exploit either their indebtedness or some of the challenges they may be having.

We know in just a quick review that Bill 156 would strengthen consumer protection in three areas: payday lending, alternative financial services, and debt collection; more specifically, protecting consumers who borrow from payday lenders, protecting them from unexpected costs of other financial services and protecting them with debt collector rules that apply broadly.

Our government wants to ensure that consumers using these services are aware of the costs, their options and their rights, because, quite simply, when consumers can make informed decisions, they make better decisions in the short- and long-term interest.

All too often, for whatever reasons, Ontarians may find themselves in financial difficulty and relying on payday loans, which can lead to an unending cycle of debt, and that's something that none of us wants to see. Some of the alternative financial services are specifically targeted to these vulnerable consumers, because when someone is in desperate need of financial assistance, they may be forced to take an option offered to them that really, again, isn't in their best interests.

Proposed changes to the Payday Loans Act would require a payday lender to implement a seven-day waiting period between loans for each borrower, provide the registrar of payday loans with authority to inspect unlicensed lenders and loan brokers, and provide repeat payday loan borrowers in certain circumstances with an extended payment plan.

Speaker, all of these things are in the interests of informed consumers. They also send a very strong signal to inappropriate players in the industry that their conduct cannot and will not be tolerated.

It would also give regulatory heft to require payday lenders to take into account certain factors about a borrower before entering into a payday loan agreement, restrict high-frequency borrowing so we end that cycle of debt and the trap that people can sometimes find themselves in, and improve payday loan borrower awareness of credit counselling services—because, again, that informed consumer is a better consumer.

Some might ask, why don't we just ban them altogether? Because community agencies who work directly with low-income Ontarians using payday loans advise us that it's preferable to have a safe payday loan than no small-dollar credit at all—so a better system than nothing at all. Our approach takes into account the stakeholder views and Ontario-specific circumstances. The majority of community agencies and poverty advocates we heard from did not support eliminating payday lending in the absence of short-term, small-dollar credit options. Consumers raised similar concerns about where they would obtain needed short-term loans. So, again, informed

consumers, better choices, a wider variety of choices, but in the right way and regulated properly with appropriate education and awareness.

The government is also monitoring the resolutions passed by municipal councils and communicating with communities in order to understand what additional powers they are requesting in order to limit payday lenders in their communities. We understand that certain areas have unique concerns, which is why the bill was informed by consultations with consumers and community agencies across the province. These include communities like Hamilton, Owen Sound, Guelph, Ottawa and Windsor.

But payday loans are not the only type of lending option that can have negative consequences on the borrower. Alternative financial services can also put Ontarians in financial situations that are not in their interest. That is why our government is addressing the cashing of government-issued cheques by alternative financial services providers, or AFS providers, as they are known—so non-bank, non-credit-union providers—by creating regulations that would require disclosures to consumers, regulate the cost of cashing government-issued cheques, and provide the consumer with more information. Again, there's an ongoing theme here of consumer awareness and protection, making sure that the bad actors don't continue to prey on uninformed consumers.

1350

Changes to rent-to-own agreements and instalment loans, through regulation-making authority, would provide information about the pricing of rent-to-own agreements and create a grace period for late payment on rent-to-own agreements; give rent-to-own consumers reinstatement rights in certain circumstances; allow the development of rules requiring instalment lenders to assess a borrower's ability to repay and provide a borrower with that assessment; and cap the costs of optional services such as credit insurance for instalment loans.

In essence, Mr. Speaker, protecting individuals in our communities who find themselves vulnerable is something that our government is interested in doing. That's what this bill sets out to do and I hope it will enjoy the support of the full House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Han Dong: I am very pleased to speak to this bill, Bill 156. First of all, I would like to congratulate the current minister for being such an advocate for consumers and the most vulnerable in our province. I also want to thank the previous ministers for working long and hard and putting consumer protection on the front burner of this government.

This bill is a very important bill. In my riding, there are many users, unfortunately, of payday loan agencies. In a perfect world, we wouldn't have to worry about payday loans and we wouldn't have these financial organizations. Unfortunately, they are needed in this society.

One of the reasons is because there is a lack of replacement. Now, I sat down with a not-for-profit organ-

ization in my riding; what they do is they actually provide a small amount of loans to individuals to get them through to the next paycheque. That service is really well managed and the default rate is very low. It's actually around 10%.

So when you think about it, those borrowers are legitimate borrowers who are just in a very difficult situation where they need some help. Some of those are newcomers. Newcomers come to this country, they have no relatives, very few friends and most likely their friends are in same situation. So when the time comes when they need some money but they know their paycheque won't be here for another two weeks, they need help. They go to these organizations. Unfortunately, there are not too many around so they have to use a payday loan service. It is a very important service, but we as a government and as legislators at Queen's Park should make sure that there is enough oversight on these services.

Now, I particularly welcome the part where, if passed, consumers cashing government cheques at alternative financial service providers will have more information and may benefit from a cap on the rate of cheque-cashing services. That's very important because again and again I have been told by local social workers that some of their clients are repeat borrowers running into problems, where they are running out of money by the end of the month, just because they are finding it difficult to manage their financial situation. I think they are the ones who really need the government to step up and provide some protection.

So I'm very pleased to see this bill being proposed. I think in today's world there are more and more expenses for people. You know, 30 years ago people didn't have to worry about cellphone bills. They didn't have to worry about all these additional expenses. It's getting to a point where more people sometimes need these kinds of loans to get by.

As a government, we must be here to protect them. By introducing this bill, I think it will do just that. I look forward to the support of the members across the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It is a pleasure to speak to Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2015. I know that my colleague Jim McDonnell from the riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry will be speaking to this for an hour. I believe that our general consensus will be opposing this unless there are some amendments that can be made.

Certainly, it's a case of legislation where there are some good things in there. There are some penalties and some fees, so people aren't going overboard. But at the end of the day, what I want to really reflect on is that a lot of the reality of the people having to go to these types of services is because of the Liberal government's mismanagement.

The highest hydro rates in North America: More people are struggling to pay their bills, and—this is

sometimes the case—they have to turn to this type of agency. Higher food costs—again, those day-to-day staples, those necessities of life, and people are struggling to keep all of that together; more taxes and fees; and higher heating fuel, diesel fuel, natural gas, propane: Those things are essential things that people need to heat and cool their homes.

There is less money in Ontarians' pockets at the end of the day, and they then are struggling. This is sometimes a way by which they are trying to get a bill paid. They need quick cash, and you need that ability to do it.

The government talks in here about perhaps dedicating more energy to appropriate credit card and financial literacy among the general consumer population. I think maybe they should try to lessen the burden on Ontarians, and then we wouldn't need quite as many of these services.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, perhaps—and I'm not trying to be trite—they need to actually understand the whole reality of trying to manage their own credit. They have doubled, tripled and quadrupled our overall debt. They're still spending \$12 billion a year on interest payments, which, for the last four years, we've asked them to try to control and not overspend the way they have. They continue to do that.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, I've been listening to the member since he started, and I hear nothing about—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General on a point of order.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Oh, sorry about that.

I have been listening to the member since he started speaking, and I hear nothing in what he is saying about the bill. I'd like him to continue and speak on the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments are intended to relate back to the speech that was given. The government members—four of them—gave a speech together. The questions and comments are related back.

I did hear the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound responding to that speech, but I think it's a good idea to remind all members that the two-minute hits, as we call them—or questions and comments, as they're more properly called—are supposed to relate back to the speeches that were given and they're supposed to be relevant to those speeches. Sometimes members will go off a bit, but they should try to come back to the subject at hand.

You've had almost two minutes. I'm going to give you another few seconds to sum up.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make sure that we're making sure that services are there and available for people when they need them. This government is making it harder, and they have to turn to these types of services. The services have to be available and applicable, and I'm happy to support it after we get some amendments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to rise as the MPP for London West to offer a couple of minutes of comment on Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act.

I listened carefully to the remarks that were offered by the Liberals on that side of the House, and much of what they talked about focused on payday loans. I want to give a shout-out to the United Way London and Middlesex in my community, which really has been ahead of the curve on this issue. They conducted a comprehensive research study back in 2012 to really understand the landscape of payday lending in my community: who was borrowing and for what reasons. As a result, a member of the United Way London and Middlesex sat on the expert panel that reported back to the government in 2014.

I have to say that it is quite disappointing that a lot of the research and input that was provided to the government is not reflected in the legislation that we see before us today. This legislation falls significantly short of taking any real, concrete actions, the kinds of strategies that are needed to really address this problem.

I met recently in my constituency office with Sister Joan Atkinson from the Sisters of St. Joseph in my community, who talked about the fact that many people on ODSP and Ontario Works are not able to open a bank account at all. They can't afford the monthly service fees. They can't maintain a minimum balance. They are ending up paying 20% to Money Marts in order to meet their rent and food costs on a regular basis. So Sister Atkinson had recommended that there be some kind of alternative financial arrangements to allow these cheques to be cashed. We don't see anything like that in this legislation before us today. These are the kinds of strategies that will make a real difference to people living in poverty in Ontario.

1400

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's an honour to join the debate on this important piece of legislation. I also want to compliment the minister, just like the member for Trinity-Spadina has, for his passion and advocacy. He and I actually sit very close together here in the Legislature and we have a chance to talk about these issues regularly. I know that he's passionate, not only about doing a good job as minister, but really about protecting consumers in an effective and balanced way. So I'm pleased to add my voice to this debate.

I have to say that, in one of my prior lives in business, I was in commercial banking and worked for the Bank of Nova Scotia. I used to be what is called a commercial banker, a commercial lender. I was responsible for lending money, on behalf of the bank, to mid-sized businesses. So businesses with revenues of anywhere from, let's say, \$10 million to approximately \$100 million was sort of the area of focus.

There were significant regulations imposed on the Canadian banks, primarily federal legislation and regulation, but there were a lot of things that the banks did, and

that I did as a banker and was taught to do as a banker when I joined the company, to make sure that the terms under which loans would be extended and the terms of those loans were well understood by the people that I was lending to. The people that I was lending to were generally quite sophisticated people. These were people who were in business; these were people who would have been approached by other banks for their business. They would have had the opportunity to be educated and knowledgeable, but it was still taught and understood that you went out of your way, as the banker, to make sure that every single aspect of the loan and its potential consequences for the business were well understood.

To me, what this bill is about is plugging that gap and making sure that people are properly informed about the loans that they're taking on and those potential implications. I think, all in all—there are a number of things in this bill that I won't have time to talk about, but this helps to protect consumers just like I used to protect businesses when I was a banker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I wanted to add a few comments to Bill 156. I'm looking forward to my colleague our critic from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry when he speaks in his hour lead.

I, unfortunately, have a number of these payday loan operations in my community. I didn't realize how many until I had a young lady come to work for me who had formerly been employed by these. One of the sad facts—and I'll get to some of the other details, but I was told that—it's unbelievable—her manager said, "I'm looking forward to Christmas." She said, "Oh, because of the holidays?" "No, no," she said. "Because people will overspend and have to come and use this facility." I said, "What a sad commentary on this province and on this industry that this is taking place."

What we want to see is access to credit counselling for individuals who are in this—I call it a cycle of poverty, distress, whatever the word is. By making life more unaffordable in this province, which is something that is the truth—I don't know how you can be ruled out of order for speaking the truth in this place, but if I am, so be it. We need to see more counselling.

I think the banks and the credit unions and the lending institutions in this province need to step up to the plate. Don't make excuses for them like the other member did. It's fine what you do for business, but what are we doing for the average person who doesn't have that type of access to credit? I think these banks and institutions are well paid. We see what they make every year: billions of dollars. They need to put some of those resources back into people so they don't have to—I'm not going to use the word that I would like to call these institutions. I won't use it in here, even though I could. I know there are people caught in the cycle who need to use them, but I would like to see the day come when we don't have that in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member from Trinity–Spadina can reply.

Mr. Han Dong: First of all, I would like to thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, the member from London West, the member from Etobicoke Centre and the member from Sarnia–Lambton for their very thoughtful responses.

Just to the point that the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound was making, I know he is not a keen supporter of infrastructure investments, but when he talks about higher energy costs, he must consider that when the Conservatives were in government, they didn't invest any money in generation and transmission infrastructure building. That's why we're playing catch-up here on this side of the government.

He talked about high food costs. He probably didn't consider that the previous federal government tied the oil price with our dollar. That's why when the oil price dropped, our dollar dropped as well, so it costs a lot more to purchase from other countries when it comes to food. I know in my community, in Chinatown, some grocers are telling us that things are going up 30% because the currency has dropped so much, and he must consider that.

To the member from London West, I agree that more work needs to be done. But I think she must agree that this is a step in the right direction, especially when it comes to broadening the definition of a collection agency to include persons who purchase debt in arrears and collect it. This is bringing legislation up to date to address these issues.

I share the thoughts put forward by the member from Etobicoke Centre: This is very important work, and it has been in the works for a long time.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the minister, and I look forward to more support and more debate, actually, coming from the other side.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: As PC critic for consumer and government services, I'm pleased to offer my remarks today on Bill 156, the alternative financial services act.

I find it a little bit scary when I hear a member of the other side actually blaming our low dollar on the Harper government tying the price of oil to the dollar. I mean, how ludicrous is that? We have some problems in this province, like high energy, and it's affecting people's ability to pay bills.

Before we begin debating this, I would like to take a moment and give the House an appreciation of why the services discussed in this bill, such as payday lending, cheque cashing and lease-to-own, are defined as "alternative." Conventional financial products are those you and I and most Ontarians are very familiar with in our day-to-day lives. They are so familiar, in fact, that we either don't notice their influence in our lives or we simply take them for granted. While on the outside they may look simple, they are a result of a series of complex economic

and social transactions that happen beyond our field of vision.

Let's begin with banking. Banks have been with us for over a millennium. The oldest bank in continuous existence in the world today predates the discovery of the continent this House stands on. Their role has evolved dramatically since then, as have consumers of bank services. The greatest factor in the growth of banks and the array of services they offer, of course, has been the explosion of the middle class in the last three centuries, who now have enough money to begin thinking about personal finance rather than making it to payday.

Let me give you just an example of how priorities have changed. Ancient banks in Europe used to issue letters of credit to consumers who were travelling to different cities, with a branch of the same bank or a friendly local bank that would pay out according to the letter's terms. There was a clear and terrifying motive to this: The possibility of being robbed en route was very high. The less faceless and untraceable cash one carried with them, the less risk there was for loss of personal property. Today, we have debit cards, not because we are concerned about robberies, but because we like the convenience of withdrawing money when we need it and making small purchases without requiring cash.

It is easy to take this convenience for granted if we don't see the cost and the complexity of the system. In order to provide us with the convenience of using our plastic cards rather than cash, retailers have to forgo a portion of the revenue in order to pay the provider at the point of sale, or POS for short. This is also the reason we often see purchase minimums for cards used in stores. Too small a purchase would mean an unsustainable amount eaten out in issuing fees for the retailer.

When we participate in the conventional financial system fully, we run most of our financial transactions through a bank, including depositing our cheques. Here is where the bank policies can become frustrating for some. Some banks will apply a seven-to-10-business-day hold on depositors' cheques in order to have the funds clear before releasing money to our account.

1410

The bank's motivation is clear: Minimize the risk of a cheque bouncing and not having any recourse against the depositing customer. This is one of the many ways a bank shields itself from risk in order to provide us with lower fees and different financial products at advantageous rates, such as loans and lines of credit.

Conventional loans and credit cards also work on the principle of minimizing risk. These debt instruments are designed to provide the issuing institution with a steady stream of revenue at minimum cost and risk. For example, a no-fee, cashback credit card from a major bank is a great option for the consumer as it involves no annual costs and, as long as we pay off the balance each month, with no interest.

As folk wisdom tells us, there is no such thing as a free lunch. No-fee products are there because issuers want us to use them. When we do, a portion of our

purchases is handed over to the issuer by the retailer as fees. The more we spend on our zero-fee card with cashback bonuses, the more the issuer earns.

Whichever credit product we choose, issuers will want to ensure we don't run away with their money. While a functioning crystal ball may come in handy, the next best option is the consumer's credit report. This is a detailed document highlighting the consumer's history with many companies, the number of credit contracts the consumer has, how many of these contracts have been paid, whether there have been any late payments or any other negative events and whether the consumer is overall a good person who will pay back what he owes.

While we are on this subject, Speaker, allow me to diverge into somewhat of a public service announcement for the benefit of all Ontario consumers regarding credit. We get bombarded on an almost daily basis with offers to repair our credit, get our credit report or enrol in one of the thousands of credit-monitoring programs that, for a fee, will keep an eye on your private information stored with Canada's credit reporting agencies. All of the information that feeds into your credit report, however, is accessible for free to every consumer once every six months. By filling out a form and attaching a photocopy of an identity document, a consumer can request a copy of their credit file.

In the stack of papers they receive, they will be able to see which accounts are associated to their name, who inquired about their creditworthiness and whether those accounts have been paid on time. This information must be verified. Seeing accounts you don't recognize or inquiries from companies you never submitted a credit check to could point towards attempts at stealing your identity and open credit accounts in your name.

Just a few weeks ago, I got a call from Visa. They had noticed that just a few minutes before, actually, somebody in the United States had used my Visa card and had quickly refunded the money to the same account. So I got a call asking me if I made the call and if I was in South Carolina, I think it came from, but the bank picked up on it right away.

It reminded me that, last December, I was at a conference of the eastern states and provinces, and one of the sessions was on credit and verification. What they were using was your cellphone to identify where you were and where the purchase was made. The computer instantly tied these together and a red flag would go up, even to the point where they would deny the transaction if they didn't meet—so instantaneous verification. But this shows where they're going at the time. Even though the amount had been taken out and put back right away, they saw that as a potential test of the system by the person who was using this card to see if anybody noticed. So it just tells you where it's gone today and how fast banks can actually check what's going on.

These errors are fairly straightforward to correct, but if left to fester, they can wreak havoc on one's credit score and shut you out of a mortgage, a car loan or other financial products.

If there is one take-away from these proceedings, it is that every Ontarian should take control of their credit file by requesting a free copy every six months from a major credit reporting company. Our credit file describes us, just as our vital statistics do. It forms a part of who we are in the outside world, whether we choose to show it or not. When it comes to borrowing money, this history can be laid bare to whoever is looking at the computer screen at the loans desk.

Why do we go to such trouble, then? In exchange for our co-operation, time and good character, the financial institution can now issue a certain amount of debt that it is confident it will get back at a reasonable rate of interest. Banks minimize their stake in the debt game by weeding out those applicants whom they consider either too high a risk or whose record is insufficient to warrant a loan.

The old adage goes that to get a loan, you have to prove that you don't need one. In the conventional financial sphere, it appears that institutions try their utmost to reach the ideal zero-risk customer base.

As I have one hour, I beg your indulgence, Speaker, to share a joke on debt. A rich businessman asks a bank for a \$5,000 loan as he is leaving on a two-week vacation. When asked for collateral, he offers his brand new luxury car. The bank accepts eagerly and issues a loan at 8%, then brings the car into secure storage. Two weeks later, the man returns and repays the loan with \$15 of interest. When quizzed about why a millionaire would need a \$5,000 loan, the man says, "Where else could I park a luxury car for \$15 for two weeks and expect that it would be there when I return?"

This whole introduction should highlight just one key issue: Conventional financial tools are available to us and to many Ontarians; however, many fall through the cracks. A small but relevant percentage of Canadians, when interviewed in 2006 by the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, said that they had difficulty opening an account at a bank or credit union.

We take bank accounts and their convenience for granted. However, without an account, life becomes a lot less convenient for the Ontarians who can least afford it. The challenges that immediately spring to mind include a forced reliance on cash, including carrying large amounts of cash on your person and storing cash at home. This increases the risk of being a victim of crime. While the middle class is concerned about the less violent but still damaging crime of card cloning, Ontarians without a bank account have to be consistently worried about theft, robbery and burglary.

An inability to receive payroll deposits from one's employer; the inability to deposit assistance cheques and government of Canada cheques, the latter being by law free of charge to deposit; and added challenges to proving one's address: This can then snowball into difficulties renewing Ontario and federal government documents.

While this House may, from my previous remarks, have developed an understanding of the working poor

Ontarians' and social assistance recipients' challenges when faced with accessing a credit product, there is another category that faces a Catch-22 situation with regard to credit. New immigrants are at a distinct disadvantage when arriving in Canada. Despite being adults, usually packing plenty of education and experience, their credit file in Canada is blank. As such, they are unable to access the same credit products at rates that Canadians of their age would, following years of building their credit through student loans, store cards and, depending on their age, even a mortgage. When financial institutions see a blank credit file or a social assistance number beginning with a "9," denoting temporary status such as a work permit or a study permit, the range of offerings for the customer goes down to almost nothing.

One of the very few credit products that new arrivals to Canada can gain access to is a secured credit card. These cards are issued under the condition that the borrower deposit into a locked account an amount equal to, or sometimes greater than, the demanded credit limit. Members will appreciate that very often, a family beginning their life in Canada and counting their pennies from payday to payday doesn't have \$500 or \$1,000 sitting around in order to make that deposit.

1420

The vicious circle then begins. Without the ability to build a credit file, the family is unable to build their access to financial products such as mortgages, car loans and lines of credit. When they do eventually build up their income in order to afford the deposit, their credit file's age will lag behind everyone else's by a significant amount, placing them at a disadvantage. When they eventually apply for a mortgage, the bank is likely to offer them a higher rate due to the combination of credit factors and credit report.

Whether we extend the credit or not, there are situations where individuals or families need cash, and they can't afford just to shrug and tell themselves, "Well, tough luck." The world, most of the time, doesn't work this way.

Conventional finance may have failed these people for a variety of reasons: risk-minimizing policy is certainly one; monthly fees that a client decided are not worth paying could be another; and a third is access. The most acute problem with financial service access is, naturally, felt in the most remote communities of the north. Banks do not have the incentive to serve such clients because the population density in the bank's catchment area won't justify the expense. Having to travel four hours to your bank is as good as not having a bank at all.

I would like to relay stories of my own riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry. Local branches seem to be following the fate of many gas stations and closing down, driven out by climbing costs, online banking and competition from urban centres close by. Just as an example, Scotiabank announced the closure of local branches in Maxville, St. Isidore and Avonmore. Residents of my riding who bank there are expected to move their accounts to the new bank location.

Other banks that closed—Lancaster, Williamstown and Martintown. Many banks in rural Ontario, in small towns—not really that remote, but the cost of doing business, for the banks, is driving these banks to close branches. There was an impassioned campaign to save the local branches, some of which have been in the community for more than a century. This, however, highlights that even Ontarians in rural areas in the south can experience a dearth of access to banks and other financial services. If the banks go and take their ATMs with them, local residents have no choice but to use one of the few ones available in town, often from a competing bank or a private provider. Using these ATMs results in higher fees for the consumer.

The same challenge of access brings people to seek cash loans at almost any cost when they need funds and conventional finances aren't available. As in my previous remarks, the perverse cycle of higher need and higher fees continues to apply. Payday lending is a risky business involving a much higher risk for the lender than in conventional finance. As long as you have an ID and a pay stub, you can borrow money until your next payday. There are no credit checks and there isn't much paperwork, and the payday lending provider doesn't shield their operation from credit risks as banks and other institutions do. The result: 10% of payday loans must be written off. They go up in smoke and become bad debt, the kind of debt that poisons any balance sheet.

Payday loans are designed for individuals who have a steady stream of income and who experience either an unexpected expense or an unexpected temporary drop in income. This can include new immigrants working several jobs, single mothers, self-employed professionals in need of funds to tide them over to the next client payout—you name it. These Ontarians aren't poor or exploited or financially illiterate; they just don't have conventional finance to turn to. Sometimes the unexpected drop in income can become permanent, or an unexpected medical expense can turn into even more needed spending. In those cases, it is very likely that the loan will go sour and the company won't be able to recover the money.

Here, however, lies the greatest difference between conventional credit and payday lending: Conventional interest is designed to accrue and compound. The longer you carry the debt, the more times the interest clock ticks, resulting in an overall higher charge. In payday lending, the loan fee is paid once, and it neither accrues nor is compounded. The consumer can't be charged the borrowing fee again, although a consistent late payer is likely to see their access to payday loans cut off entirely. It becomes a black-and-white scenario: You either can borrow or you can't altogether. Late payers in conventional finance are instead punished by higher interest rates and the denial of higher-premium credit products such as credit cards with greater perks or advanced bank accounts. This becomes a situation where one shifts between various rates of interest.

Advocates against payday lending build their argument on the fact that the maximum \$21 fee for borrowing

\$100 combines to form a very high annualized rate. Their argument would hold some water if the fee were designed to be accruable, ie., if it were charged to the borrower's account at regular intervals and compounded; that is, calculated on total remaining principal capital plus the unpaid fees. This comparison between credit card interest and payday lending is therefore a fallacy. It is a comparison of apples to oranges. These two products can't be compared: firstly, because credit cards belong in the secured, filtered, shielded, credit-checked world of conventional finance where high-risk potential borrowers have already been weeded out. Secondly, the loan fee can't be recharged on the same loan at the next two-week interval. What you pay to get the loan is what you will be out of pocket for when you repay it: not a cent more, not a cent less.

Consumers aren't foolish. Most credit cards offer grace periods ranging from 14 days to a month on purchases. Cash advances are subject to fees and interest without a grace period. However, one can expect to get away with a \$5 flat cash advance fee and 0.75% total interest on the cash for a two-week period.

Let's work with the real numbers, then. A client walks into a payday loan provider and asks to borrow \$800. He is given \$800 and pays the \$168 maximum fee allowed in Ontario for a payday loan. If the same client had a credit card, he would take out the \$800 and be charged the cash advance fee immediately. Two weeks later, he would have accrued \$6 in interest, for a total of \$11. With these numbers in hand, if a consumer could have obtained a credit card with a high enough limit to satisfy the cash needs, wouldn't he or she have one already?

If consumers don't have a conventional financial product that suits their needs and they are resorting to payday lending, isn't that more a reflection on the Minister of Consumer Services and the Minister of Finance? If it is indeed the case, the government should be looking at themselves and taking a moment to ponder whether, rather than spending millions of dollars on promoting themselves and their job-killing policies, they could instead have spent their money on financial literacy and awareness, saving Ontarians hundreds of dollars in fees.

We have therefore established that payday lending is not an interest product, but a fee-based product. You pay once and you don't pay on the same loan again.

We have also established from conversations with the industry that 10% of all payday loans go sour and can't be repaid. If a bank had such a loan default rate on their books, they would be ordered out of business. Banks make revenue by charging us the interest rates that we are used to, close to \$5 on each \$100 per annum. This covers their expenses with the Bank of Canada, the necessary risk adjustments and their operating expenses, and leaves a margin for profit. A 10% default rate would drive a bank or credit card issuer into the ground.

Right off the bat, therefore, we see that a fee-based product that must be charged in full at the moment of taking out a loan should cost about \$10 for every \$100. This amount is designed to take into account the inherent

risk of the loan only. To that \$10, we must add the incredibly high licensing cost, hundreds of dollars per location in Ontario; rent and utilities for the location, including growing hydro rates; staff wages, because people don't work for free; bank fees for processing borrower's cheques and the corresponding bounce penalties, as well as the lender's own interest charges for the capital they need to borrow from the bank at market rates to lend to customers. The exception to the last point would be when a payday lending company sits on its own stash of cash waiting for customers to come in, a very poor strategic choice considering the same cash could be earning you more when properly invested in conventional finance products such as dividend stocks.

Back in 2004, Ernst and Young conducted a survey on the then-budding payday industry in Canada and found that the weighted average of extending each \$100 of credit was \$15.69. That was broken down as \$10.58 of operating costs, 52 cents as the cost of loan capital, 57 cents as the cost of supplementary capital and \$4.02 for bad debt costs. It appears that, in 12 years, we may have taken down the operating costs, but the bad debt costs may have risen. If you recall my previous remarks, I mentioned that if a commercial bank had the bad debt performance of the payday lending industry, they would face either a shareholder revolt or a run on the bank. So let's consider it in the vein of comparing apples to apples.

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We see the data from the same Ernst and Young report regarding banks' provisions for credit losses. This measure is a direct quantification of how much all lenders pay extra for loans because their loans go sour. In the same year, 2004, major commercial banks' provisions for credit losses ranged anywhere from 0.15% to 0.82% for average loans, a fraction of the payday lenders' reported bad debt provision portion of their writing of loans.

My advice to the government and to advocates, therefore, is not to make attempts to compare payday lending costs and services to conventional finance products because, in reality, most consumers who could opt for conventional finance products would take them. If they came to a regulated payday lender, there's a reason. Sometimes, it's access, but sometimes, it's just a matter of time.

For instance, a consumer with a line of credit can access substantial amounts of money fast. With a loan, the consumer needs to wait several business days for the bank to process the application. In both cases, the consumer will often need to offer the bank collateral, something that many Ontarians just don't have or are unwilling to for a variety of reasons.

Regulated payday lending fills the cracks in the federally regulated banking and credit system through which all Ontarians can fall. Despite this, the two industries are very different sides of the same coin. On one side, you have conventional finance, where consumers invest time to build their creditworthiness and net worth in order to access financial products at better rates and are prepared

to wait for all credit checks and internal bank reviews to be completed.

In the payday lending industry, the dynamic is much more rapid. A loan can be extended in minutes, as long as the customer's documents check out. If time is money, then the contrast between the conventional and alternative financial product costs expresses that concept clearly.

According to the Canadian Financial Capability Survey from 2006, the demographic most likely to have used payday lending and cheque-cashing services were aboriginal peoples in northern communities. Conventional banks do not extend their physical presence to small northern communities, and many on-reserve First Nation members find it nigh on impossible to secure any kind of collateral-backed financial product due to their community structure.

We come, then, to Bill 156. It follows in the footsteps of the payday lending act, which created a framework for payday lending to be legal in Ontario, after the government of Canada created an exemption to several federal provisions in matters of lending and interest.

Payday lending is widespread in Ontario. It is regulated, and consumers of payday loans enjoy a wide arrange of protections including current requirements for lenders to post the cost of their services very clearly and make consumers aware of their rights. Bill 156 takes the current regulatory framework and expands it immensely in favour of the government.

Let's begin by examining schedule 3 in detail. In its first section, the government's first salvo in its charge on the payday lending issue, if you wish, Bill 156 immediately takes business matters into legislative hands. Under this provision, a payday lender who extends a third loan within a two-month period to the same customer will offer that customer a two-month repayment program, no questions asked.

So let's analyze this, just for a second: one customer, three payday loans, two months. Something is definitely wrong here. Even an untrained analyst could see that a person who resorts to a payday loan three times in two months is selling one of every two paycheques they receive. These customers need credit counselling and money management skills, not different payment terms.

The industry is well aware of this. The Canadian payday lending association is always adamant that payday loans are supposed to be an occasional source of emergency funding to cover an unexpected expense or a sudden drop in income. I can sympathize with some of their customers who opened up a hydro bill and were threatened with disconnection, after surviving the shock.

A payday loan is not supposed to be a regular source of funding. It is an expensive way to receive immediate cash, and customers are well advised of this. Three payday loans in a two-month period means your situation isn't involving a sudden expense or an income drop; those factors are a consistent, gnawing stressor on your finances, and you will definitely need to look at your budget.

By introducing a mandatory extended payment period, the government is doing two things wrong. Firstly, they're allowing a distressed borrower with clear unresolved financial challenges to extend their payment period without providing any assurances that this particular course of action will make their financial situation any better. On the contrary; they are increasing the chances of the loan never being repaid as the borrower's financial situation is likely to demand another payday loan from another lender while the other one is being repaid. It is a recipe for personal financial disaster.

Secondly, the government is equating payday loans with the problem. Resorting to payday lending is a symptom of an underlying financial condition. Whether it is caused by one of the factors I listed in the opening part of my remarks or others, it is a borrower's budgeting that needs to be tackled, not the provision of a payday loan. Most payday lenders will meet customers they know and trust halfway already by offering extended payment periods when the customer indicates his or her economic situation is difficult. In those cases, the lender is happy to extend the payment deadline because they are confident the customer can meet their obligations.

What the government is doing, however, is creating a mandatory offer of a longer repayment period without any guarantees that the borrower can actually meet his or her repayments. The end result could well be an increase in loan defaults and, therefore, a higher cost for everyone, including conscientious borrowers.

Eventually, lenders may choose to simply not extend a third loan. This is arguably the intent of the legislation: to regulate third loans out of existence. This section is an effective way to achieve this; however, it doesn't solve the underlying problem of the client's financial challenges that drove him or her to a payday lending company in the first place. This person will still be in need of money whether the lender allows him to take out the loan or not.

Where will the client turn to? They could turn to a competitor since there isn't any national database on payday borrowers, and the cycle begins anew. People with such frequent payday lending needs don't need restrictions on payday lending; they need intense credit counselling and access to good money management skills. Cutting them off from the precarious lifeline of payday loans won't do them any good if they're still loose in the sea of their financial problems.

Just to explain that: When you walk down Yonge Street at 8 o'clock on any night, there are no less than a dozen of these payday loan offices open. If you don't go to one, you simply cross over to the other one. So we're not really doing very much by shutting the person out of getting a third loan. There's a problem there, and it needs to be fixed.

The next provision of the bill is also designed to cut people off from access to payday loans by prescribing a minimum waiting period between loans. My previous objections to limiting supply of a service apply here as well. How long a customer can be barred from payday

lending is irrelevant for the purposes of this discussion. A person in financial distress who has no access to conventional finance is no more likely to suddenly have the means to sustain themselves from paycheque to paycheque without access to payday loans than with it.

Let me reiterate that a payday loan is supposed to be a way for Ontarians with no immediate access to conventional finance products to come up with the cash to cover a sudden expense or drop in income.

As I said before, three payday loans in a two-month period are symptomatic of permanent financial distress. Payday loans aren't the problem in this case; they are simply an expensive lifeline. Diligent and law-abiding lenders already refer such clients to credit-counselling services in order to help them get their financial house in order. However, much more can be done to ensure that Ontarians don't fall into a situation where payday lending becomes the only financial product that can suit their needs.

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Next, the government delves even deeper into micro-management of the industry. Section 21 of the bill creates a power for the government to govern the content, size and location of advertising and signage for the payday lending business. This bears an uncanny resemblance to a much-maligned signage regulation in the province of Quebec, a characteristic of the province we have so far proudly avoided.

As anyone who has ever run a retail business will know, all locations are different. Depending on the property type, one could have any number of options or restrictions for placing signage or advertisements on their premises and on the outside of their buildings. What the government is going to create is a one-size-fits-all approach that will probably force many locations to either close or invest heavily in renovations in order to comply with this new regulation, while at the same time doing nothing to help payday lending clients access conventional finance.

The last provision written in the Payday Loans Act by this new bill allows the government to order businesses to stop providing financial services outside of payday loans if it so decides. Speaker, it would not make sense to separate key-cutting from automotive shops or shoe repairs, and it would make just as little sense to impose a separation between payday lending and other alternative financial products offered by payday lending locations, such as cheque cashing or prepaid credit cards. It is demonstratively the wrong thing to do.

Allow me to go back to the Ernst and Young report, which did break down operating and other costs and their impact on businesses in the industry according to whether the business provided just one product—payday loans—or a wider range of services. All costs were considerably higher for single-product businesses. The reason is crystal clear to anyone who has looked at the industry: The payday loan is a risky proposition for lenders while other products such as fee-based, prepaid credit cards, tax filing and cheque cashing are much

safer. Just as in many competitive industries, the profit comes from the higher-value-added products rather than the principal offering. We can compare the payday lending locations to a gas station. While there's a steady but small profit from the gas—or a payday loan—the largest profit comes from the convenience store.

I do not wish to question the government's good intentions, as I am confident they wish to ensure consumers entering a payday lending location aren't overwhelmed by the product offering and the potential pressuring to accept a product they don't really require. This is, however, the wrong way to go about achieving their aim. The minister is setting out a regulatory framework down the path taken by Quebec, which resulted in payday lenders quitting the province altogether.

When payday lending was legalized in Canada, Quebec chose to cap the annual interest rate at 35%, which would translate into about a 1.16% biweekly interest. If payday loans were an interest-based product—and they aren't—a payday loan would cost no more than \$1.16 per \$100 borrowed. As you can see, Speaker, this low fee wouldn't be enough to cover the operating costs of a payday loan operator or the cost of capital. Bad debts would then deliver the final blow to the business. The practice of payday lending was effectively priced out of the province of Quebec, leaving only other services such as cheque cashing.

Don't think for a moment that the financial stressors that contribute to people seeking payday loans vanished altogether with the everyday loan providers. Just as taking a decongestant won't cure your cold, driving payday lending out of business doesn't resolve the question of residents being in worse financial shape than they would like to be and without access to conventional financial products to suit their needs.

In the absence of alternative financing service providers, people would then be driven to the unregulated and underground markets, which carry infinitely more risk and both higher social and economic costs. A simple Google search can reveal hundreds of companies operating outside Ontario and, potentially, federal regulation, soliciting Ontarians for financial information in exchange for cash. There are no guarantees regarding the trustworthiness of these companies. There's no way of knowing whether their privacy policies comply with Canadian or Ontario laws, and there is certainly no guarantee they won't just take your valuable data and sell it to the highest bidder. Most of us would back away from such a deal immediately, but if we put ourselves in the shoes of the self-employed person whose contract just fell through and whose next contract won't generate enough income for a while, we would find ourselves tempted to go to great lengths to put food on the table.

In an ideal world, payday lenders wouldn't be needed, but we don't live in one and we won't see one in the foreseeable future. Payday lending is the safety valve that stands between people's legitimate need for cash and money management advice, and the unregulated, unscrupulous and unreliable underground debt market.

As far as the Payday Loans Act is concerned, this bill is bad legislation. It refuses to tackle the cause of Ontarians' financial distress while at the same time micro-managing an already tightly regulated, overseen and taxed industry.

Shortly after my first appointment to the role of critic for consumer services, the Auditor General released the 2011 annual report, which contained a follow-up to the previous value-for-money audit of the Ministry of Consumer Services. As in the previous audit, the auditor found that most Ontarians wouldn't consider the ministry a top source of information about their own rights or an avenue to resolve a complaint against a company. In this year's estimates, tabled on March 23, we see a net reduction of \$1.1 million in the funding level for the consumer protection program at the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. This pales in comparison to the drop since fiscal year 2014, the last for which public accounts were available. In 2014, the ministry's consumer services division was funded with \$19.3 million. This year, the program will receive just \$15.6 million.

My constituency office fields several complaints a month from constituents who are unaware of the existence of the ministry or its consumer protection program and the help they can provide through their toll-free line. My advice to the minister is to get rid of schedule 3 of this bill altogether and focus instead on giving Ontarians better access to conventional financial services, credit counselling and financial literacy.

Some of these initiatives can be carried out in-house. I suggest that the minister begin by reducing his reliability on the ministry's website and engage Ontarians more broadly in the community in order to educate them about their rights as consumers and the money management tools available to them, which would prevent the stress of unexpected expenses that can't be covered out of savings or insurance.

The government could also give Ontarians more chances to retain a larger portion of their incomes and save it or use it for investment. As their policies over the past decade have eroded Ontarians' disposable incomes through job-killing policies, payroll deductions and sky-high hydro rates, the government could look themselves in the mirror and reverse their actions, which are leading more and more Ontarians closer to the limit of not being able to afford to pay their bills.

While banks are federally regulated and credit unions may choose that option under new federal rules, the Ontario government can still facilitate more Ontarians' access to conventional finance by promoting bank account ownership and direct deposit. One initiative I would suggest the government take into consideration would be the reduction of the impact of bank account and transaction fees for the neediest Ontarians, in the same spirit as Ontario Works today covers vital statistics certificate fees for its clients.

According to a 2006 general survey on consumers' financial awareness, 56% of Canadians reported their bank fees being \$10 a month or lower. Conversely, 44%

of Canadians spend in excess of \$10 a month for a bank account. These fees may appear low to Ontarians with a stable income close to or above the median. However, they can be a significant impact on a budget of a low-income family or a social assistance recipient. Mitigating this expense could assist in reducing other expenses for the government and its agencies, such as the expense of producing, mailing and tracking cheques. The government may be trying to shield consumers from bad players in the payday loan and lending industry; however, with the law of unintended consequences, they may be depriving Ontarians of access to lawful, alternative services without giving them a way to transition to conventional financing.

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Let me now turn to two significant amendments this bill makes to the Consumer Protection Act. The first change concerns agreements to cash government cheques. Payday lending outlets will often offer their service for a fixed fee plus a percentage of the cheque amount. In exchange, the customer receives the full amount of the cheque without delays or holds. The cashing service, naturally, assumes the risk of a cheque being fake, an increasingly common problem as printing and editing technologies evolve.

There are already plenty of options for cost-free cashing. First and foremost, cashing a government of Canada cheque is absolutely free of charge in any Canadian financial institution, regardless of whether the client has an account at the institution or not. However, in the 2006 Financial Consumer Agency of Canada survey that I mentioned, only 22% of the respondents were aware of this.

References from 2015 highlighted that Royal Bank of Canada branches in Toronto would cash an Ontario Works cheque free of charge. This is the kind of partnership the government of Ontario should be promoting with banks and credit unions across the province in order to give recipients of government cheques more options to keep all of their money rather than seeing it evaporate in fees.

Instead, Bill 156 simply gives the government carte blanche for regulating the total fee charged for cashing a government cheque and mandating that the information must be displayed where such a service is offered. Regulated payday lending locations where cheque cashing is offered already provide consumers with ample information regarding the fee they will be charged to cash a cheque. The net result of the disclosure provision will likely be minimal.

The current fee structure for cashing cheques of all kinds, including government ones, tends to fall within the “three and three” rule: for instance, a fixed \$3 service charge and an additional 3% of the cheque amount. This is undoubtedly higher than the fee for depositing cheques into an account at any financial institution. Yet some consumers may choose this route if they require the funds immediately and can’t afford to wait for the deposit to be held. As I said before, Speaker, time is money, and if the

consumer has an account at a financial institution where cheques are normally held before being cleared into the account, the consumer may opt for a faster but more expensive route in order to access funds on the same day.

If this legislation passes into the books, I advise the minister to be extremely careful in drafting regulations under the fee cap provision. Whichever amount the ministry chooses as the fee cap, it must be significantly high enough to cover the inevitable losses from falsified cheques. If it doesn’t, we will experience what Quebec experienced with payday loans: Cheque-cashing services will vanish without there being any conventional finance alternative available. This won’t solve the problem. Cheques will still be issued to individuals unable to deposit them in financial institutions, but where will they turn to?

I will also point out that this bill doesn’t take into account that many users of both payday lending and cheque-cashing services are self-employed and therefore likely to come into the store with a non-government cheque for cashing. Their transaction will not fall under the provisions of this bill, potentially creating a two-tiered cashing framework.

Let me turn now to the leases, where general credit agreements are covered in two distinct parts of the Consumer Protection Act.

Bill 156 contains a short amendment to section 87 of the act to give the ministry the power to terminate, by regulation, more types of leases to which the Consumer Protection Act, part VIII, will apply. This is a powerful amendment, but we’ll have to wait for the regulations to be issued under this new authority in order to gauge the government’s aim.

The ministry and advocates report, ostensibly, that the intent of the bill is to provide a grace period for consumers who went into a lease-to-own contract. The wording is nowhere to be found in Bill 156. There is, however, a general regulation-making provision written into the existing Consumer Protection Act for part VIII leases that allows the minister to issue regulations governing those leases. Section 87’s definition of the leases that fall under its jurisdiction includes four particular types of leases:

- fixed term leases of four months or more;
- indefinite-term leases;
- auto-renewing leases until such time as one of the parties terminates them; and
- leases where the consumer is expected to pay some additional fee at the end.

Most rent-to-own contracts would fall within these parameters, and I would encourage the minister to highlight why the inclusion of the carte blanche provision is necessary.

We have heard stories about rent-to-own companies charging consumers the equivalent of almost 60% annual interest rates, resulting in significant overpayments by those consumers who can least afford them. Missed payments can trigger severe penalties or even the forfeiture of the goods, as well as the funds already invested in

them. Members on all sides of this House agree that an annual interest rate with recurring charges and compoundings greater than 60% is usury, plain and simple. Approaching such an interest rate on any kind of long-term lease may be legal, but is nevertheless reprehensible and morally objectionable.

We support the government's initiative to make rent-to-own contracts more transparent, including giving consumers the true cost of the contract and a grace period for missed payments. We would like, however, to see these regulation-making powers hard-coded into the legislation rather than simply falling under the general regulation-making power existing in section 128. Allow me to explore a tangential issue here, Speaker. Rent-to-own contracts would look much less appealing to consumers if they saw what the true lifetime cost of the contract was. This is one facet of the all-in pricing issue.

The minister will be well aware of other industries where all-in pricing is being demanded. Consumers in Ontario who wish to buy a vehicle are currently faced with two price sets: one provided by the manufacturer's advertising and one provided by the dealer. The two are different because the manufacturer is not obliged to include the dealer's costs or any other costs associated with the vehicle purchase in the advertised vehicle price. Consumers therefore find themselves at a loss at the dealership, where the all-in cost of the vehicle becomes clear. This is unfair to the dealer, whose honesty is called into question, and to the consumer. If price transparency is good for the goose, it must also be good for the gander.

The new sections of the Consumer Protection Act also deal with general credit agreements. Bill 156 establishes a particularly curious precedent where a lender that enters into a credit agreement regulated by part VII of the Consumer Protection Act has to disclose to the consumer an evaluation of the risk factors that led to the decision to issue or not issue credit. As an example, we don't ask this of our banks, credit card companies or insurers. Their risk evaluation methods are proprietary information and consumers can see only the outcome. These algorithms are one of the trade secrets that lenders compete on, screening for the most secure borrowers.

In a recent judgment, the Supreme Court highlighted that provincial disclosure regulations might now impinge on federally regulated agencies and the federal government's ability to regulate them. In that particular case, a Quebec lender was found guilty of not making certain Quebec-specific consumer disclosures. If and when the government chooses to amend the Consumer Protection Act, part VII, to increase the range of credit agreements part VII extends to, we could see a significant challenge coming our way, where credit issuers would be required to disclose their evaluations of a consumer's credit risk. I wish to share my concern that this would restrict Ontarians' access to credit across the board.

I will now turn my attention to the last portion of the bill, the amendments to the collections act. Collections is a thankless job where a company sells bad debts to a collector for pennies on the dollar and the collector then

expends his resources trying to recover those debts from the consumer. In short, the direct owner of the contract has thrown in the towel on the consumer and sold off the liability to cut his losses.

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Collections agencies are consistently the most-complained-about businesses, according to the ministry's own statistics, and there are very good reasons for this. A collector's duty is to be persistent and annoying until such time as the debt is repaid. When exercised correctly, the collections profession is a source of consumer annoyance and stress. When the collectors overstep their bounds, however, it can be a case of criminal harassment, uttering threats and more.

The current collections act regulates individual collectors and their employees very tightly. There are very precise, legislatively coded restrictions on what a collector can do, how often they can call and when they call etc. Consumers at the receiving end of collection calls are, understandably, subject to incredible amounts of stress. They often don't have the funds available to them, and could potentially face the stigma of their debt situation becoming known on the street.

In this optic, I find it surprising that the government is removing the requirement for individual collectors to be registered with the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. Today, collectors must be registered and any changes to their employment status with an agency must be notified to the registrar. No one can collect money in Ontario without that registration, and the registrar may deny either an individual or an agency registration based on past conduct. If this bill makes it into law, the individual requirement will be gone.

Here is a worked example. Under the current system, if John works for WeCollect, both John and WeCollect must be registered and in good standing with the ministry. When John leaves WeCollect, his registration remains valid but he may continue collecting and be subject to the ministry's disciplinary procedures if he steps out of line. Under the new law, WeCollect notifies the ministry of John's hiring and firing; however, John can still go and collect on behalf of agencies that are not headquartered in Ontario and may turn a blind eye to John's antics.

The only individual collectors who will remain registered under this new act will be those single-person operations that purchase debts and collect them. For all others, it will be a free-for-all. As I've highlighted before, Speaker, the ministry's record of making Ontarians aware of their rights and their ability to call the consumer protection line is far from optimal.

Considering the heat collectors place on consumers, I wish to convey to the minister our strongest objection to removing the requirement for individual collectors to be registered with the ministry. There will always be bad players in any industry.

Payday lenders had their black sheep in the Cash Store, which sought to circumvent provincial payday lending regulations by marketing their product as a line

of credit, with a mandatory repayment period for a significant portion of the borrowed capital. That sorry tale is finally over, as the Cash Store was ruled against in an Ontario court and has filed for bankruptcy due to ongoing financial problems.

Collection agencies have their own demons as well. Consumers have the right to be protected from bad players in the industry. Although we welcome the government's initiatives to impose harsher penalties on collection agencies that breach the law, I strongly urge the minister to take out all provisions that would allow any individual to carry out the business of collecting debts without first being registered in Ontario. We don't need this complication.

The ministry will also have to step up its efforts to improve its inspection and enforcement regime. In the 2011 annual report, the Auditor General highlighted that a significant amount of work remains to be done in order to address consumer complaints and promote compliance in the areas of business that the ministry regulates. Cuts to expenditures in the consumer services programs don't point to an improvement on this front.

Overall, this bill contains one good provision on penalties for collection agencies, one so-called provision regarding rent-to-own contracts, and the remainder could be defined as either bad or redundant legislation designed more for publicity than the actual improvement of the Ontario consumer's lot. We will be filing amendments to trim down this bill and to make the bill address the true concerns of the industry.

Speaker, we have many issues where we see this government micromanaging business. This is just another case of where it's getting in the way and not getting after the real issues that are hitting consumers in Ontario.

We see people coming into my constituency office, and they have problems trying to decide whether they'll eat this month or do they pay off their bills. One example that was given to us: A person is hit with a surprise hydro bill. We've had hydro bills brought into our office where it was three or four or, sometimes, 10 or more times of what the normal rate is, supposedly because of an issue with smart meters.

The consumer has to decide: Does he make that payment or does he take a chance of having the service cut off? We all know that, if the service is cut off, there's a huge penalty to get it hooked up again. So, yes, in some ways maybe the \$100 fee seems like a lot to someone who needs money today, but the alternative may be a \$1,000 fee to get the hydro reconnected, plus all the problems and delays that go with no hydro. In my own riding, we had a grocery store owner hit with that situation. He can't afford to turn his freezers off, or he's out of business.

Those are the issues that are hitting many consumers in Ontario. I think that we're not giving them any help by getting in the way of some of these businesses that are there. If they are closed, people are into trench-coat borrowing, which we've seen over time as not being the right answer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise in response to the comments from the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. One of the things that he said during his speech that really struck me was about the fact that Money Mart and similar institutions were never intended to provide ongoing, monthly cheque-cashing services; they were intended to be emergency services that would be available for temporary situations. But what we have seen, in my community and across the province, is people going month after month after month because they can't stretch their ODSP cheque or their Ontario Works cheque to the end of the month; they have to try to cash it early just in order to make ends meet.

In my community, the Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty just reported. That panel did a six-month, very extensive public consultation. One of the recommendations that they made was to have collaborations with the financial sector to provide banking alternatives, eliminating the need for predatory lending. What we have seen is that people don't have access to bank accounts; they aren't able to afford the monthly fees; they aren't able to maintain a minimum balance. So they end up having to go back to these payday loan companies on a regular basis and end up paying amounts like 20% or more.

I appreciate that this legislation includes a provision to put a limit on the fee charged for cashing a government cheque. Unfortunately, there are no details about what that limit might be, which is similar to most of what is in this bill. It's left up to regulation, with no information about what's going to happen. But we need much more in place to stop these predatory practices.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Chris Ballard: I'm delighted to stand and make some comments with regard to those put forward by the MPP for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

I can think back to the days when I was the executive director of the Consumers' Association of Canada. This is long before we had payday loan companies; they were not in existence in Ontario. But we had other household-finance-type companies that I'm sure that people of a certain age will recall, and all the troubles that went along with them.

People in those days would say, "Why doesn't the government simply ban them? They're preying on vulnerable consumers." In some cases, that might have been the truth. But I know, as we did our investigation as consumer advocates, that what we heard from the anti-poverty activists and those communities was that, in many ways, these institutions are preferable—to have a safe payday loan than to regulate these types of companies out of existence. In those days, the fear was that people would simply go off to an unsavoury character who would loan them money at even higher rates than those finance companies. I think that underlies a lot of the reasons why we don't want to outright ban payday loans altogether.

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As I said, the majority of community agencies and poverty advocates we talked to in this round did not support eliminating payday lending in the absence of other short-term, small-dollar credit options. Consumers raised similar concerns as those we heard from advocates, and I think this legislation will go a long way to protecting vulnerable consumers and making sure that those companies remain viable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As our critic pointed out, a loan rate of over of 60%—I think he described it as incomprehensible and morally objectionable. Sixty per cent is the maximum interest rate allowed under the Criminal Code of Canada.

However, through the Ontario legislation—that would be the Payday Loans Act, 2008—Ontario is exempt from that federal legislation, which means that the interest rates being charged in Ontario are something like 546% if you compound this annually, which is the normal way of comparing loans.

The Globe and Mail had quite a good article and a series on payday loans; the one article was written May 15, 2015. We know that currently, with an industry that charges a maximum fee on a two-week payday loan—\$21 on \$100 that's borrowed—that does translate into 546% a year. It's interesting to read that in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, the industry is allowed to charge 600% a year. Newfoundland does not have legislation. That means they're subject to the Criminal Code of Canada, and the interest rate there is 60%. New Brunswick is at 60%. It's quite interesting, by way of comparison, that in the province of Quebec, the interest rate cap is at 35%. It probably goes without saying that there aren't any payday loan vendors in the province of Quebec.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise in debate on Bill 156.

The government here had an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of Ontarians, and once again we see that they've failed at that simple task. They've been talking about taking control of payday lenders and that predatory practice that has really exploded in the province of Ontario over the last decade or two. We have to ask why, in fact, we see such a prominence of payday loan sharks setting up in communities all across the province. There's a lack of good employment. There's an explosion of precarious employment. We've got pay equity issues. We've got lower rates of industrial unionization. We've got lack of access to quality child care. We've got massive student debt loads.

This has all, again, expanded under the watch of the current Liberal government, and they wonder why they have to bring about legislation to take control of predatory lenders. Well, you've created the economic conditions that require people to live hand to mouth. They

cannot make ends meet and they have to find out any way that they can to pay the bills. This will continue and it will continue post passage of this bill. The efficacy of this bill is in question. I'll leave it to the vice-president of the Consumers' Association of Canada, who says, "It's very difficult to comment on an announcement about an announcement about an announcement."

"I hate it when government does that. It says, 'We're going to do something but it's going to be a year before we do something and we can't tell you anything until we do it.'"

Lots is left to regulation in this bill, Bill 156, which is not uncommon for the government side.

We'd love to see really substantial, concrete actions to address the precarious nature of financing in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments for this round.

I return to the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thanks to the members from London West, Newmarket–Aurora, Haldimand–Norfolk and Essex for their comments.

The point that's being missed in this legislation is helping out the consumer who has to use payday loans. As I said, there are even some examples of people who are fairly well off, but there are always times when they can get stuck, especially if we're talking about new Canadians who don't have the ability to go into a bank because they don't have the established credit.

The banks are in business to make money, and there's nothing wrong with that. We encourage it. We have a strong banking system. But they don't take on the vast majority of clients that use these services, and for good reason. These are people who desperately need money, sometimes just through a lack of financial management skills. We don't do anything through this bill to enhance that. It's fine to stick in a card and say, "If you want the cheque, you're going to have to sign the card." Everybody knows that that's done readily.

Anybody who's desperate for cash doesn't want to be tied up with small details—details that on the surface are made to sound like they're really going to make a change, but everybody knows they won't. All we're doing is micromanaging an industry. They could make some changes that would help people who are in need of money. Go back to the banks; make some low-cost accounts available to them—low-cost, but low-services as well. There needs to be something that doesn't cost, for some of these people, a good portion of one of their cheques a year just to hold a bank account.

We need to look at something that's going to make a difference and, in the end, reduce the need. There will never be an elimination of these services, but we need to reduce the need for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to rise to speak to Bill 156, An Act to amend

various Acts with respect to financial services. It proposes amendments to the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act, the Consumer Protection Act and the Payday Loans Act. It is meant to strengthen protection for consumers who use alternative financial services, but it does fall significantly short of delivering any real action to Ontarians in financially precarious circumstances.

Speaker, I am always glad to be able to stand in this Legislature and bring voice on behalf of my constituents. This act deals with consumer protection when it comes to those alternative financial services, and those alternative services are those that are outside of credit unions and banks. We're talking about payday loans, cheque-cashing places, payday advances, these alternative financing operations—basically predatory money lending and loan sharks.

This bill is scheduled to take effect in 2017. It's basically a wish list that this government plans to address through consultations. Most of the bill's value is in its regulations, and of course, those are yet to be determined. Even the minister admitted there "are not perhaps as many details as we would all like immediately right now."

We see here another bill that is a framework without substantive amendments. I guess Ontarians are going to have to wait until 2017 to see if any action is taken by this government.

My colleague already mentioned this quote—but it's a good one, so I'm going to share it myself—from Mel Fruitman, who is the vice-president of the Consumers' Association of Canada. He said, "It's very difficult to comment on an announcement about an announcement about an announcement. I hate it when government does that. It says, 'We're going to do something but it's going to be a year before we do something and we can't tell you anything until we do it.'"

Something else it doesn't do is address all of the proposed reforms that are raised in the 2015 consultation paper. In the fall of 2013, the province launched its review of the Payday Loans Act, which then led to an expert panel report in 2014. The further consultation that followed was undertaken in 2015 and was on broader changes to payday lending, other alternative financial services and debt collection. That paper was released by the government in mid-June 2015.

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Again, as I said, this bill doesn't address all the proposed reforms that were raised in the 2015 consultation paper. It doesn't introduce any new requirements regarding money transfer services, a new licensing regime or price caps. My colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, our deputy leader, has called for payday lending fees to be capped at \$15 per \$100 and for the creation of a database to enforce the ban on rollover loans; it doesn't address those issues either.

I don't personally have a particularly deep understanding or historical background when it comes to predatory lending. I've certainly spent time in various

communities and driven around and seen many cheque-cashing, payday advance or Money Mart establishments. I didn't necessarily know all of the ins and outs—I had an idea of what they did—but I've learned a lot in preparation for this talk today.

I will say that "alternative financial services" seems to be a misleading label. "Alternatives" are options. Most people think that something that is an alternative is an option, but these are not options. These predatory lending businesses prey on those without options. They make their money at the expense of those in need and in precarious situations.

I have always been fortunate when it comes to finances. I have had options. I remember opening my very first bank account in a bank not far from my house. I lived in an area where there were banks. We have many parts of Oshawa that are areas of more need, and they don't have banks in those areas. They have these payday loan places and alternative financial facilities.

But I was fortunate enough to grow up with options. Actually, I recently just left my long-standing relationship with the TD Bank. My grandfather was a TD Bank manager in a very different time, and my grandmother was a teller, and now she's a TD Bank pensioner. But I am no longer part of the TD family. I have been glad—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I am.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Well, it might explain the blazer today, your TD green blazer.

Since coming to this House, what I've been learning about big banks and I would say a broken moral compass—the more disillusioned I have become. Fortunately, I have options and I've been able to leave the banking world and have moved my finances to a community credit union, because I have that option in my community. But many people in our communities find themselves without fair financial options and find themselves in the predatory lending cycle.

I'd like to share a voice from my community. Tracie is one of my constituents. She came into our office to get help because she found herself in a muddle with payday loans. She had had some family challenges and tough choices and few, if any, options, as she saw them. I spoke to her yesterday, actually, and she told me a few things that I'd like to share.

Tracie said, "I was in trouble with some payday loans and needed the loan.... I needed the loan. And found myself in trouble and turned to someone. I couldn't get it at a bank because of my income...."

"I know I was stupid. I signed it ... and then I realized I was in trouble. So I got a loan ... at Citibank—and remortgaged—for a lot less than what they were giving me...."

"I phoned them and said I have the money to pay it back—nope, you have to pay the higher amount, and the insurance company—they charged to stop a payment when they hadn't even sent the paperwork. It cost me \$2,000 to get out of it. Two weeks cost \$2,000...."

"They are just gouging people. [I] tried everyone to help me. They are just like loan sharks—except they

don't come and break your legs. It's terrible. I just think they are taking advantage."

We chatted for quite some time so that I had a clear understanding of her circumstances. She had gotten in a tangle with payday loans and wanted a consolidation loan. She went to one of these companies—this was weloanmoney.ca. They say, "If you can buy it, we can finance it!" She went to them and wanted a consolidation loan, around \$8,000. In terms of all of the fees—a fee of almost a thousand dollars and another \$700 fee that was basically to walk across the hall and do paperwork—by the time it was all added up together, the cost of borrowing was actually almost the cost of the principal amount. So what she had to pay, with taxes and everything, was basically double what she had gone in for.

Looking at these numbers and recognizing that these are the alternatives for people who are wanting to dig their way out of debt, are wanting to have a solution and climb out of the hole—that isn't a way to effectively climb out of the hole. We've been talking today about coming up with strategies and coming up with some kind of solution that allows people to move forward. That's a conversation I think we should have.

This government is talking about more consultations. This bill, as I said, is a framework. They want a consultation period, but that consultation period might actually provide the alternative lending industry with more time to prepare for more regulation, if any regulations are actually introduced at all.

These issues are not new. In fact, I'd say that money-lending has been around since there's been money. I remember Bible stories and I remember it was the moneylenders who were unceremoniously kicked out. But here in this Legislature the government kind of rolls out the red carpet and seems to invite them in.

Anyway, with all the discussions about banks and big money, I'm always surprised when there's a bill put in front of us that doesn't proudly announce its sponsors. I think that that will be the next thing, that we'll pick up a piece of legislation with "This legislation sponsored by" this corporate donor.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Money Mart.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes, by Money Mart.

Anyway, through the various consultations and committee hearings with any of the bills that we have, they seem to be quite Toronto-centric. The details are put online; you can find them in that tiny little time-allocated—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the member to withdraw her unparliamentary remark.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I withdraw. I'll try not to accidentally say it again because I am not sure what I said.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You can't impute motive. You can't suggest that a donor would get a bill.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Ah, thank you. Okay; I withdraw.

But to the point of consultations and committee hearings across all of the bills that deal with payday loans and lending, through the years—because as I said, this is not a new issue—the Legislature has heard from voices explaining and defending these alternative financial services. We hear from loan sharks. We hear from their slippery friends who like to swim in behind them, but we don't hear from those who are broken and beaten by these lenders and companies.

We will continue to reach out to stakeholders, but more importantly, I think we all need to be listening to, and talking with, our constituents who are living in precarious circumstances. So many people come into our offices in dire need. While they may not be discussing this part of their struggle, while they may not share with us that they are ensnared or entangled in predatory lending cycles, perhaps we should recognize that while they're struggling with everything else—paying their bills, finding child care and working for too-low wages—this is another part of their struggle.

In Oshawa, in a preliminary search that I did and just looked up—at first glance I did a quick search for Money Mart, cash advance locations and payday loans. There were about 30 little dots that came up on my Google map in the downtown and south end area. In that same area there were 23 banks and credit unions. However, in this area it was a very clear divide: The north end and the downtown part were where the banks and credit unions were; and in the south, the area with more need, you would find these predatory lending facilities. It was really frustrating, actually, to look and see that there is just such a clear divide and there aren't options in our areas with need.

1530

I'd say that this whole industry really does capitalize on poverty and need. People don't choose to use lenders because they have the best deal or the best products; they choose them, or are forced to choose them, because they don't have other options when it comes to food and rent or helping their kids, if there's something that they need. That is what drives people into these facilities. We find many people who are struggling with mental health and addictions; they are also quite vulnerable and find themselves in these lending cycles.

These are individuals who, as I said, don't call to tell us their stories very often. They don't often know that what is being done to them might be illegal. They don't recognize that sometimes if they were—that they could be part of a class action lawsuit, that they could have a lawyer working for them. They just know that they won't have enough money for the rent to clear; they know that there isn't grocery money or bill money for a few more days.

I may not have been very familiar with payday loans, but I do get the concept of desperate and immediate need. We know that I came out of teaching; I had been teaching in Whitby at a school that has long since closed, but it was an area that drew from a community with higher economic need—newcomers to Canada, great kids, great families, but many families who were struggling.

I remember one time, actually, a class trip. It was five bucks for each kid; they had to bring in this \$5. One of my students, day after day, said, “Nope, don’t have it, don’t have it, don’t have it.” That wasn’t unusual, but I wasn’t able to reach mom, because mom worked interesting hours. Anyway, I called her, I managed to get her, and she said that there was no problem, and she could send in the \$5. But I asked this child, “Why wouldn’t you tell me it was okay and that there was the money?” Because he had made me feel that they didn’t have it, and he couldn’t; I was more than happy to cover it, because that’s what most teachers do. But he said that he didn’t want his baby sister to not have milk so that he could go on a trip. So here I had a grade 5 child who was not telling mom that he needed this money because he was making the grown-up decision for her that, if there was \$5, it should go to the milk for his sister instead of to him for this trip.

I think we already know that children are learning lessons along the way all the time—in this case, not just about money management or prioritizing—but they learn where they live. They learn what they see. They learn what they’re immersed in. So for children whose families are stuck in this cycle, that’s what the children see as well. To not have fair options that allow people to manage their money, make plans and be able to get ahead, we’re just furthering that cycle.

Oh, man, time flies. I was worried that I would run out of things to say.

Something else that I will say: I taught in the south end of Oshawa as well, most recently—again, an area of significant need. There are a lot of people struggling to earn fair wages, to find and pay for child care, to pay bills and to make their money stretch to cover what it is that they need. One of the things I learned when I was teaching those kids, my grade 7s and 8s, is that we had a lot of challenges when it came to computers. If they had homework to do and they wanted to type it up, they didn’t have computers at home. They didn’t have access to the Internet. They might have access to the Internet through their video game’s hand-held system or their phone, and they knew where the WiFi was in the community because that was free, but most of my students didn’t have access to consistent Internet. They might have had a friend who did, but they didn’t themselves. So we had challenges in that community that, across the broader community, were unheard of.

I bring this up because this is a government that hosts consultations almost exclusively in Toronto, with notices posted online. We have short, time-allocated windows of opportunity to respond to notices. When we see things posted, when we see things—I was going to use the term “advertised”—communicated, you have to respond in short order. In communities without computers, in communities without consistent access to the Internet, how are they just going to happen upon these consultation times or navigate the committee process? Also, to travel to Toronto is expensive. For people who are watching every dollar, to pay to take the train to come on in here

and share their stories about being stuck in this predatory lending cycle, that’s just not an option. They’re usually working a few jobs, so they don’t have the flexibility of time.

Mr. Speaker, I’ve been learning a lot about this industry, and I think I’m going to take the opportunity, rather than to use my own words, to share some from Mr. Peter Kormos—I’m drawing from Hansard back in 2008—on this issue because, as I said, this is not a new topic in this Legislature. The former member from Welland said:

“The bill demonstrates this government’s perspective towards poverty. This government doesn’t want to abolish or eliminate poverty; it wants to manage it. It wants to sanitize it and put a little bow on it. When you’re regulating payday lending, that’s all that you’re doing: You’re dressing up poverty a little bit. We should be passing legislation banning payday lenders, abolishing them and making sure that every resident of this province has reasonable access to a financial institution—and specifically, that means credit unions and caisses populaires, those that are provincially regulated, so that they don’t have to resort to payday lending.”

Also, he said:

“If you really wanted consumer protection in this province, the government would be telling payday lenders, ‘You’ve got to have a big rip-off sign at the front door and at every kiosk.’ Instead of saying, ‘May I help you?’ the clerk in the payday lending operation would have to say, ‘Good afternoon, sir. I’m here to rip you off. I’m here to take your money and give you nothing in return. I’m here to turn you into a payday lending junkie.’”

I’m pleased to be able to take us back in time, but these are the same conversations. We have individuals who probably were stuck in this cycle back in 2008 and continue in this cycle now.

We use very polite and accepting language in this House—and I accept earlier when I was unparliamentary and I apologize. We use very polite language. We’re talking about “consumers.” I think that’s ironic when we’re talking about a predatory lending system. Those who are being consumed are who you’re calling “consumers.” They are literally being consumed by this industry. “Alternative services” sounds so nice, like an option, but really, they’re not enticed, they’re not invited; they are ensnared. They are tangled and strangled by this industry.

Any of our industries, whether it’s going to be the tobacco folks or predatory lending that targets those in need, I would say, shame on them, but I would also challenge this government to really give these regulations that we have yet to see teeth to make this worthwhile and to make a difference to those who are suffering at the hands of these lenders.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It’s always a pleasure to rise in this House and add a few comments to the debate on the payday loans amendment act, Bill 156, on behalf

of my constituents in Cambridge. I know that those watching at home—David and Ann Harvey, this afternoon—are listening with great interest about this bill and this important legislation.

In 2013, the ministry committed to review the payday loan legislation, and here we are debating it in the House, and it's a good thing that we are. This review was expanded to increase other types of high-cost alternative financial services such as instalment loans, cheque-cashing and rent-to-own services, as well as debt collection.

We undertook broad public consultation to inform our approach to strengthening protections for consumers of alternative financial services and for those who are struggling with debt.

The proposed bill will protect consumers in several important ways. For instance, consumers of payday loans would have to wait seven days between payday loans, giving them more time to consider their options. Also, for those who borrow repeatedly, they would have to wait for a longer repayment period in certain circumstances.

As we know, Speaker, these institutions often prey on vulnerable citizens who get into a circle from which they can't easily get out of, and it's why our government really needs to step in and help to protect them.

Some alternative financial services are often targeting consumers with limited financial resources or in financially vulnerable situations. So our government wants to make sure that consumers using the services are aware of their costs, their options and their rights.

If passed, Ontario will be a leader in Canada when it comes to protecting consumers from the risks of using alternative financial services. Reducing the risk of accessing these services supports our vision of Ontario marketplaces that are fair, safe and informed.

1540

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments. The member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

Applause.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's great to have the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound here today, as he's always in the House working hard debating many of the bills. I'm sure he'll be up on this bill, which is Bill 156, an act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act and the Payday Loans Act.

I listened to the member from Oshawa, who had a number of good points on this bill. I guess we have, as our critic said, a number of issues with this bill. For me, I think we need to be having a discussion on the broader economy and the cost of living in Ontario. It's unfortunate that so many people in the province have to use the services of some of these institutions, and I think the government really needs to be focusing on getting hydro bills under control. I know we've been talking about that for five years. Every MPP is hearing from their constituents—whether it's a senior on a fixed income, a mom and dad with kids at home or the small business—that costs are going up when it comes to their hydro bills.

The second thing is—and it punishes workers in the province—the level of taxation in Ontario. In fact, it actually discourages people from working extra, harder and more hours, the way the tax system is set up in the province. In fact, I think the highest rate now has been increased to about 54% in the province.

Wages are stagnant. If we had people earning more income, it would deter people from using these institutions that we're talking about in Bill 156. Most importantly, we need well-paying jobs. The manufacturing sector has been hit particularly hard, with over 300,000 jobs being lost.

I look forward to speaking to this bill a little later to talk about more of these things.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'm proud to stand in place today and make comments on behalf of the residents in Windsor—Tecumseh about the wonderful 20 minutes just delivered by my good friend and colleague from Oshawa.

A hundred years ago when I was at university, I remember having a piece of leather around my neck. It had a brass medallion and it said, "Poverty is no crime." For some reason, I still remember that. I still believe that it's no crime to live in poverty, although I think it is criminal the way some people who are poor or living in poverty are treated.

I want to say that when I was looking into this bill, I talked to a member of my family who works at a pawnshop. She said, "Don't go under the understanding that only people in poverty are using the pawnshops or the payday loans," because she deals with people all the time who are factory workers in our area, and perhaps they've overextended themselves on buying a home with more bedrooms than they really need, having the newest truck out there and having a snow machine, a cottage and a boat. If they don't get all the overtime they're expecting, then with payday coming up a week or so down the road, and they're just running out of money to keep paying the bills, they do often put something in the pawnshop for a short-term loan or they go to the payday loans.

These are people that could be on the sunshine list if they were working for the government. Don't think of just the people living in the lowest margins of society as the ones we're talking about here today. When we're talking about payday loans or about short-term borrowing, it affects us all. So this legislation, whatever we do with it, will affect us all as well.

I just want to commend the member from Oshawa for the brilliant 20 minutes that she just delivered, because she really knows what she's talking about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: It truly is my honour to be able to rise in this House after a small hiatus for some knee surgery and recovery. It's always great to be able to stand up and speak in this House.

I will echo many of the comments that were made by my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh. While he has

factory workers, in Sudbury we have nickel bonus miners. In my nine years of politics, this is an issue that I've been dealing with quite often. One of the owners of a cheque-cashing facility in Sudbury said, "It's not the individuals who you would think that come into my facility; it is actually the nickel bonus miners who come in." We relate it then to, I think, the bigger picture about financial literacy and making sure people are financially literate and have a really clear understanding of what they're getting into, because they graduate or they get into this job and they make a big paycheque and then they don't understand that at the end of the month, if they are overextended, they just get themselves into this cycle, and the cycle continues to keep them going to these payday lenders.

So what you see in this legislation—and I think if you went to every party in this House, we all think something needs to be done. Of course, the opposition has their points that they're trying to get across to us, but if you really look at some of the things that they're going to be doing in this legislation, there are steps that are going to address that perpetual cycle that some people get stuck in.

Of course, this is also going to committee, where I know the opposition will bring forward some of their ideas and some of their amendments. But I think the member from Oshawa talked about how this isn't a new topic. This has been something that's been talked about even at the federal level. At the federal level, prior to this current government, the Conservative government that was there had been bringing forward voluntary codes. Those voluntary codes were toothless. At least now we have something that has some teeth to really help protect consumers.

With that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Oshawa can now reply.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the comments made by my colleagues around the room, from Cambridge and from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

To his point about really focusing on the cost of living, since I've been elected, the theme in this room has been Hydro One and the cost borne by our constituents and the rising cost of getting by, whether that's bills, whether that's affording families, whether that's affording groceries. I also appreciated his point that wages are stagnant and that someone who is working full-time should not be in poverty. Those are pieces of the conversation that we need to be remembering.

While I have a significant distaste for this industry, it does exist. While we need to regulate it, we also need to do our best to help people avoid it entirely. Thank you to the member from Windsor-Tecumseh for the reminder, also echoed by the member from Sudbury, that people who use these facilities or use these services—I use the term loosely—are not necessarily who you would think. Anyone can find themselves in a challenging situation, and so to have alternatives that are fair is important.

When we're talking about cycles, short-term borrowing in cycles, sometimes it's education that is missing or the financial literacy piece that needs to be addressed. I would worry, though, that any time we are talking about financial literacy and education, there's always that idea that if you give them the information, then all will be well. We need to make sure that the information isn't coming from this industry and that it is coming from a positive place to try and encourage people out, not to keep them in this cycle.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act. I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and also with the member for Etobicoke North.

Speaker, you may recall that a year or two ago, we amended the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act. At that time, what we were looking at were some really quite objectionable practices that some of the debt collection agencies had in terms of pressuring people and some of the measures they were taking to try and collect debt. So our first priority was addressing the predatory conduct that we saw in some sectors of the debt collection industry, but we've always understood that there was also a need to look at the whole payday loan sector and also at things like instalment loans, cheque-cashing establishments and rent-to-own services. We've done extensive consultation on what we should do about some of those issues.

1550

I thought it was interesting that my colleague from Newmarket-Aurora was speaking a few minutes ago and talked about his experience in consumer protection, because there's a tension between making some of these financial services—just getting rid of them in some cases, but also there's a tension with some of them actually being useful to people. I think we heard that in some way with the remarks from the member from Windsor-Tecumseh.

One of these things where there's a bit of a tug-of-war is the whole practice around cheque cashing. What we often find in our constituency office, which happens to be located quite close to the Ontario Works office, is that when people who are in those difficult circumstances, or people who maybe don't have the stability of a permanent home—in many cases, banks won't cash cheques. In many cases, banks will have rules that say, "If you bring us a third-party cheque, we'll only cash it if you have an account with us." Of course, many people with risk actually don't have a bank account, which means they can't get their cheque cashed except at one of these cheque-cashing outfits.

One of the things that we're doing here is setting out some new rules around the cheque-cashing establishment. These rules don't apply to federally regulated banks or the provincially regulated credit unions. They apply specifically to these alternative financial services.

They require the cheque casher to disclose information and provide consumers with an actual statement of what they're up to. This is because, in many cases, the cheque cashers really don't disclose how much of a fee they're charging to cash the cheque. People don't realize that when you take your cheque to one of these cheque cashers, they may be discounting the cheque, taking a very, very large chunk of the cheque, and charging it as a fee. That has to be disclosed to the person, under the new legislation, before cheque cashing happens.

The other thing we hear, again from constituents, is that if they get a cheque from the government, standard financial organizations may not even agree to cash that cheque. Certainly, a lot of the cash-chequing agencies historically have again wanted to charge one of these unreasonable fees for cashing a government cheque. There's no risk in cashing a government cheque. I mean, it's backed by the government of Canada or the government of Ontario or maybe the municipal government. There's no risk in cashing that cheque. One of the things that this law would do is provide the authority to cap fees for cashing government-issued cheques so that these people can at least go to the cheque casher and get their government cheques cashed without being charged some unreasonable fee.

Another thing that we sometimes see happening is people who have somebody coming to the door, or somebody, in some way—maybe online—doing rent-to-own. Of course, when you look at rent-to-own—something like a water heater or something like that—when you look at the terms of rent-to-own, you'd actually be further ahead to go to the bank and get the loan and just pay for it, because in essence, the interest that is charged in the rent-to-own is so high that it's really quite an appalling deal.

Once again, on these rent-to-own services, the amendments would provide additional lease regulation-making authority to govern the information that must be attached or displayed around a good to be leased; provide consumers with a grace period for the lease period's payments—right now, we have grace periods for things that you buy outright door-to-door; govern the right of a lessor to terminate that lease; and allow for reinstatement, if you miss a couple of payments, to carry on with the deal that you signed.

There are a number of things in this bill that I think actually will help consumers who are financially stretched in one way or other to be treated fairly by the institution.

I'm now going to share time with the Minister of Natural Resources.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Thanks to the Minister of Education for sharing the time today. I'll be sharing my remaining time with the member from Etobicoke North. I just—sorry? Did I get it right, Etobicoke North?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I thought so. Thank you.

I'm happy to speak for just a few minutes today on Bill 156 and congratulate the minister for bringing this forward.

Consumer protection and consumer protection initiatives are obviously very serious to our government. I can remember in my constituency office in Thunder Bay—Atikokan—like most members, I expect we all spent a lot of time when it came to dealing with energy retailers in the province of Ontario. I can think of dozens of examples of constituents coming into the constituency office in Thunder Bay. I would say that as a result of the changes that we brought in, consumer protection initiatives, our constituency office in Thunder Bay and I'm sure others around the province were able to help their constituents that had entered into energy-related contracts from door-to-door retailers and who found themselves in very difficult circumstances. Through our legislation and regulatory changes, we were able to help a number of those people, and I would expect that through this legislation as well, Bill 156, we are going to see some of those same benefits accrue to our constituents right across the province. So it's a good thing.

I was just going to make a few comments, in my little bit of time this afternoon, about a comment that was made earlier. I suppose it's not a surprise that there was a link that was attempted to be made—that there has been this explosion of payday loan lenders in the province of Ontario as a result of the economic conditions that have been created by the government; at least, I think that was the language that was used by one of the earlier speakers. In one sentence, the speaker said that they had been around for at least 10 to 20 years. Well, I guess if they've been around for at least 10 years, that gave us two years before that, because we came into government in 2003. If they've been around for 20 years, as the speaker went on to say, I guess that means they've been around for a very long time, and the explosion of these businesses had absolutely nothing to do with our particular government. They are a business, like many others. They are a business that we have concerns with and that we're trying to regulate and make safer for the consumer side of the equation. Nevertheless, they are here, and they've been around for some time.

I would say that those comments seemed to be made in a bit of a vacuum, as if the economic conditions that we all find ourselves in were, in some way, shape or form, not created by that great recession that we all went through in 2008, where 30 million to 40 million people worldwide, I would say, give or take, lost their jobs. We in Ontario find ourselves in a very difficult circumstance. Ontario is the biggest subnational economy in Canada. Ontario, I think, represents approximately 40% of the total GDP of Canada. As such, when the global economic recession took hold, Ontario was of course disproportionately affected by that great recession relative to the rest of the country.

In fact, I remember the criticism would be—we would find ourselves often compared to Alberta. You'll

remember, in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012, when the oil was gushing out of the ground, those who wanted to criticize us for the economic climate that occurred as a result of that recession would say, "Well, that's fine. There's a recession going on. But why don't you look out to Alberta? They seem to be doing okay." Of course, that was a ridiculously simple narrative, but it seemed to be something that people wanted to try to put out there and criticize us for. Of course, we see now that the oil is no longer just gushing out of the ground, although it could, but they just can't economically do it. As a result, Alberta is finding itself in some very difficult circumstances as well and, I would say, through not necessarily any fault of their own. The price of a barrel of oil has just a little bit to do with whether or not they're going to keep getting it out of the ground.

1600

Speaker, there is a lot that has gone on, and any link that's attempted to be made to the economic climate in Ontario being somehow responsible for an explosion of payday lending retail outlets in the province of Ontario, I would put forward, is a bit of a stretch.

I would say further on the economic climate in Ontario, as well, before I yield the floor here shortly, that we have done, on a relative basis—I think most would agree—quite well post-recession. I think I've heard the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure on a number of occasions talk about—I think the number is somewhere in the range of 700,000 net new jobs that have come back to Ontario since the depths of the recession. I'm pretty sure that I've also heard him state that the vast majority of those are full-time, good-paying jobs. We're often happy to remind people in Ontario that we are leading, I think, Canada or North America, when it comes to foreign direct investment.

So I think that by and large we're doing some things quite well in terms of trying to get the province to come back economically. There's a significant amount of job creation that has occurred. I think we are still, as many people know, in a period of slow growth. There are some who will say that it's going to persist for quite some time, that those years of 3% to 5% GDP growth may not come and revisit us for some time—some would say perhaps never again.

Speaker, all in all, I just wanted to put those comments on the floor, relative to the comments that were made by an earlier speaker that somehow Ontario is responsible for the growth of this particular sector. I think it obviously cannot hold water when you put even a little bit of a test to it.

This is about Bill 156 and consumer protection. I spoke a bit earlier about some of the energy pieces we've done in the past. I thank the minister for bringing this forward and I'm now happy to yield the floor to the member for Etobicoke North.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke North.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Thanks to my colleagues the Minister of Education as well as the Minister of Natural

Resources, who shares the same floor as me on the sixth floor of Whitney Block: top floor, corner office.

As the MPP for Etobicoke North, I have many residents, constituents, family, friends and so on who may be of more modest circumstances and modest means. In that circumstance, many individuals do find themselves having to take up the services of outfits such as those we are attempting to regulate and to monitor and to—shall I say—cleanse.

It reminds me, Speaker, if I might for a moment use a bit of a medical analogy—because I will encounter people in a state of vulnerability who may have tried this-that-or-the-other-type of therapy. It may be something that is actually either debilitating or possibly even life-threatening, but certainly very worrisome, whether it's bad asthma or cancer or HIV and so on.

Unfortunately, many people, trying to perhaps go beyond the usual channels of medical care, may end up either signing away, paying for and contracting with outfits that are offering perhaps services or therapies or devices or procedures that may not really be scientifically validated or approved. Of course, there's a whole movement to try to regulate that. So I see this almost as a kind of financial health bill, precisely, as it says, strengthening consumers' financial protection. By analogy, I think it's astute and warranted.

Now many people, for example, will know that things like alcohol and smoking have detrimental effects—even sugar, by the way—and people come up to me and say, "Why don't you just ban it? Why don't you just ban sugar?" I've had constituents say that to me literally. I suppose, if you were a hard-core diabetic doctor, maybe you would try to attempt to ban sugar, but that is something beyond the realm of possibility for a hundred different reasons and, no doubt, 47 laws and statutes.

Having said that, we can nevertheless bring to bear the government of Ontario and the various ministries—the Ministry of Finance, the Financial Accountability Officer and so on—to regulate an industry which of course can, on occasion, prey on individuals who are vulnerable, who are financially in debt, who are destitute, who are maybe having trouble making ends meet. That is, of course, what this particular bill is all about. Basically, I suppose, it's to go through the golden mean, a middle pathway—unlike, for example, banning sugar or alcohol or tobacco, because that is something not really within the purview of the government.

Government is committed to protecting consumers and, of course, to protecting Ontarians from a cycle of debt. The cycle of debt is something that's very important. Speaker, as you will know, for individuals, whether they're using the services of payday loans or cheque-cashing outfits or even pawnshops and so on, these tend not to be one-shot deals. They tend to be recurring. There may be a cycle of dependency that is created, and through the miracle of mathematical compound interest, as you will know—5%, 10%, then 5% and 10% on the 10%—it keeps going on, ad infinitum. I can write you the equation if you'd like, Speaker. That is

an inescapable debt cycle, and unfortunately, there are individuals—certainly within my own riding, and perhaps elsewhere in Ontario—who are succumbing to that cycle.

What do we plan on doing? The bill would help to protect consumers in several important ways. Consumers with debts in collections would benefit from debt-collection rules that apply more broadly, including applying them to debt purchasers.

Consumers cashing government cheques at alternative financial service providers would have more information and may benefit from a cap on the rate of cheque-cashing services. Whether we're talking about horrendous interest rates or, as it will be known, usury, which is like interest rates with a vengeance—which is, by the way, outlawed in all major religions, probably for precisely this reason—this will be brought to bear to regulate the level of interest that can be charged. As I mentioned, especially when that interest is in the double digits, that's when the compounding effect goes exponential, literally and figuratively.

Consumers, for example, using rent-to-own services—which are very hard, I would say, to understand the finances of. If you actually run the numbers on rent-to-own or even just pure mortgage financing, it can be something very significant and, I would say, probably beyond the understanding or true comprehension of the many, many consumers who are, unfortunately, the very people who fall victim.

Consumers using instalment loans would benefit, for example, from cost control of certain fees, such as optional insurance. God bless the corporations that are out there: There's a fee for everything, Speaker, as you will know. There's a fee for telling you that you have a fee. It gets literally to that level of absurdity. Unless you read the fine print—which I cannot, because it's usually in a six-point or an eight-point font, unless I stick my face right into the paper, myopic as I am—you really will (a) not be able to physically see it and perhaps (b) not be able to intellectually understand it. Corporations of this nature know this. That's why I think it's very important that we speedily pass, expeditiously pass, Bill 156—strengthening consumers' financial protection—the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It's time for questions and comments related to the speeches that were just made by the government members. Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: I just want to bring a few points in. I had to step out for a little while to cover some committees, so I'm not certain of all of these.

I think there are a lot of people who actually need this type of service, who access these services, including the cashing of cheques. As some of the members have mentioned, in our vulnerable times, there are a lot more people needing to use these. Sadly, that's a result of where this government has taken us. A lot more people, with the increasing rates, are forced sometimes to have

that short term, and they need it. It's not always a bank account. Some people can't even get that bank account. For people who have just recently arrived in Canada or who have negative credit experience, this is a very valid thing for them.

One of the concerns that has been raised is that the consumers who resort frequently to payday loans need to receive credit counselling. Limiting their access to payday loans doesn't solve the underlying problem, so we need to make sure that these types of services are there.

One of the concerns that has been raised to me is that the bill is more about micromanaging by the government than creating a safer and more informed consumer environment. I think that's one of the things we can't lose sight of.

The member from Windsor–Tecumseh, my friend Percy Hatfield, suggested that there are people at various income levels who are needing these types of services because of the state that they find themselves in with this government.

1610

A number of their members talked about the debt cycle, and yet I find it very interesting, in the almost five years I've been here, that we've been asking as, certainly, the PC opposition—and I believe some of the third party members share this concern: that the government actually continues to overspend and they become debt-dependent. They're actually trying to tell other people, "Don't do as we do; do as we say. Hold the line; don't get into these situations. You shouldn't need these services." At the end of the day, this government has doubled our debt to \$308 billion over their 12 years. So they've become dependent on that debt cycle of which they speak. It's great that they bring in legislation and try to spin that this is going to save everyone and it's going to make a big difference—but at the end of the day it's their management of money and it's their ability to keep the deficit and debt under control and particularly hydro rates, so people aren't in those vulnerable positions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments related to the speeches that were given just now by the Minister of Education, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and the member for Etobicoke North?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's my first opportunity to speak on Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, and to respond to the members of the government on this issue.

First, I would like to say that I don't think any of us are big fans of payday loan businesses, but they fill a role. Unfortunately, that role continues to exist.

I would like to respond directly to something the Minister of Natural Resources said. He seemed to take umbrage that members of the opposition blame the financial state of the economy under the government as one of the reasons why there are so many more payday loans.

I both agree and disagree with what he says. It's not all the government's fault. That's obvious. Payday loans

existed before this government came into existence, so it's not all the government's fault. He seemed to state that it was none of the government's fault, but then a few breaths later he was saying how the economy was doing much better because of the government. You can't have it both ways. Often, we sit here and hear that the government has created 300,000 or 400,000 jobs. That's also not completely accurate.

One thing that is accurate is that more people, specifically in my riding, need payday loans so that their hydro doesn't get shut off. The hydro is getting shut off because they cannot pay the bills in rural Ontario, specifically with the delivery charges. If you're on low-density delivery charges, you just cannot pay the hydro costs in this province. It's a huge issue, and that's one of the reasons why payday loans are running rampant: so people can heat their houses.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments related to the speeches that were given by the Minister of Education, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and the member for Etobicoke North?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It's a pleasure to rise and add a couple more comments on today's debate on the payday loans amendment act, Bill 156. It's an important debate and it's interesting to hear comments from all corners of the Legislature this afternoon. I think all of us in office, those even before I was elected in 2014, recognize that there have been ongoing issues with some of these payday loan companies that are preying on some of the more vulnerable folks, and that people have gotten themselves into a cycle of being unable to pay for them. The comments that I hear this afternoon, certainly from the Minister of Education, the member from Etobicoke North and the Minister of Natural Resources, are talking about how we need to move forward with legislation that's going to go out and protect some of the people who don't know what they're getting into sometimes. Innocently, they will go in and try and get a payday loan and will recognize too late, without having really looked into it, that they're now having to get another loan to pay for the loan that they just got into—that continuing circle that we talk about.

I think that this government has recognized that there's an important piece of legislation behind Bill 156 that we've consulted broadly on—on rent-to-own agreements and instalment loans, through regulation-making authority, that would insist that these agencies have to provide information about the pricing of rent-to-own agreements, create a grace period for late payment on rent-to-own agreements, and give rent-to-own consumers reinstatement rights in certain circumstances. That goes a long way to protecting the vulnerable citizens we were talking about.

The last point that I wanted to make is that it will allow the development of rules to require instalment lenders to assess a borrower's ability to repay and provide a borrower with that assessment. That will go—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Questions and comments related to the speeches that

were made by the Minister of Education, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and the member for Etobicoke North? Questions and comments?

We will now have the reply from the member for Etobicoke North.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Speaker, I'm willing to accept that admonition that the speech refer to the speech of the member from Etobicoke North and others.

I thank my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, at his auctioneer pace, in which he admitted his thoughts; the always sincere comments of the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane; and, of course, my honourable colleague from Cambridge.

Many things to say with regard to this industry: We've been, for example, asked in our broad consultations, especially with some of the unique circumstances across Ontario, to ban the industry, which of course we cannot, because many places in Ontario—including my own riding of Etobicoke North—may have, as I mentioned earlier, many folks of modest income, modest circumstances who may actually require the services of this industry. Having said that, when we see interest rates at a baseline of, for example, 21%-plus being charged, with hidden fees and hidden clauses and hidden contingencies, this is something that really, probably, needs to be exploded, explained, regulated and protected. At the end of the day, as stewards of the province of Ontario, it's our responsibility to make sure that the services that are available to our residents, our consumers, our constituents are honourable, legal and in their very best interests.

For example, there are individuals who will approach—and I've seen some of this, or maybe you have seen some of these documentaries or programs. Various clauses are offered—literally, it's written in legalese of a very high-level bureaucracy which no one can really comprehend. I have to say that that's part of what Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, is attempting to do. Ultimately, it's about protecting our consumers who are in the financial marketplace.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm proud to stand up today and follow our lead from our critic from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry this afternoon, to discuss Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2015. First of all, I want to thank my colleague from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, our critic for consumer services, for his thoughtful lead-off on Bill 156 this afternoon. I thought he did an outstanding job outlining the position of the official opposition. He gave an excellent overview of the financial services this bill is dealing with and how the government's proposed changes would impact related businesses and customers in Ontario, Speaker.

I think we have all heard stories, back in our ridings or wherever we've been across the province, about predatory practices from payday lenders and heart-wrenching stories of consumers who have become trapped in an

endless cycle of debt—actually much like, I would say, this Liberal government. We talked about the debt last week, that \$308-billion debt in the province—that I tried to cap, mind you. I just want to remind the House that the Liberals and the NDP joined together to defeat that. But this story of struggling families and individuals being taken advantage of is a huge concern, and many cities have considered or are currently considering measures to deal locally with that issue.

As elected officials, I would say we have a moral and ethical obligation to do what we can to prevent these situations from occurring. I will say at the outset, though, that I don't think it serves us to paint all lenders or all borrowers with the same brush. Harsh, one-size-fits-all legislation for an industry with a few very bad apples is a clumsy approach. Those bad apples absolutely need to be dealt with, Speaker. We do absolutely need to do right by the communities that we serve in our ridings across the province. But unfortunately, what I see in Bill 156 is more micromanaging the industry and providing window dressing rather than doing the difficult work of dealing with the root cause of the actual issue at hand.

1620

Payday loans are a financial last resort for people, Speaker. Unfortunately, now more than ever, people are being pushed to this extreme. Just last week, we heard hydro bills are going up yet again. My colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke highlighted that issue in question period today. Life continues to be more unaffordable for people in this province—small businesses, seniors on a fixed income, families with young kids. We all hear it time and time again in the communities in which we serve.

Some time ago, the Minister of Energy tried to brush off the \$2-billion price tag on the gas plants as “just a cup of coffee.” Well, the fact is that this government wants to keep brushing off adding to hydro bills every few months, a few more dollars for licensing fees, a few more dollars for fuel—in fact, 4.3 cents a litre for fuel—a bit more for wine, and a nice chunk off the paycheque for ORPP. Speaker, these extra charges add up. Since November 2015, the average electricity bill in Ontario has gone up by almost \$187 per year.

Since the so-called net-zero deal the government struck with teachers included raises for teachers, that means savings will have to be found in the classroom. This comes at a time when parents of children in public school are getting hit almost weekly for fundraisers to cover classroom costs.

The product of these decisions is more people being forced to seek out loans and creative financial manoeuvres just to get by. Parents are going without so their kids can join in on pizza day at school, and staying up late to do their laundry at off-peak hours to save on hydro. Many more are accessing food banks to feed their families. In fact, in 2008, the average person using a food bank used it for 12 months. In 2015, it was up to 24 months. Thirty-eight per cent of these people using food banks have a college or university education. This is Ontario we're talking about, Speaker.

The point here is that there are systemic problems in our province that are making life tough even for a family with an average income. A survey conducted at the end of last year by the Canadian Payroll Association showed that more than half the people in Ontario are living paycheque to paycheque. That is the highest rate of all the provinces in our country. More people are living paycheque to paycheque in Ontario than anywhere else in Canada. Nationally, almost half of the population reported that it would be difficult to meet their financial obligations if their paycheque was delayed by even a single week. Forty-two per cent of the people in this province reported feeling overwhelmed by their debt. Again, this was the highest rate in Canada. As an aside, I wish the government felt the same—overwhelmed by the debt that they're pushing on to future generations in this province—because I think it's immoral and unethical.

Speaker, these aren't just statistics. These are numbers that paint a heartbreaking picture of life for too many families in Ontario. Put into this position, overwhelmed by debt, living paycheque to paycheque and struggling to provide for their families, people are too often forced to access payday loans.

Close to home, Speaker, the United Way London and Middlesex took a look at the issue of the use of payday loans. They sat down with the industry to discuss how and why these services were being used in that region. After studying the problem, Andrew Lockie, executive director of the United Way London and Middlesex, said, “The use of [payday lenders] isn't predicated by irresponsibility—it's predicated by desperation.... People aren't using these services to get extras. It's to keep a roof over their heads or put food on the table.”

Now, I am not saying consumer protection isn't important, because clearly it is. But it overlooks what the real underlying problem is in our province: Reducing access to legal ways of obtaining emergency cash without providing consumers with a clear path to financial sustainability is likely to drive them to the illegal loan market, which is far more—

Mr. Paul Miller: A point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member—

Mr. Paul Miller: Madam Speaker, I do believe we don't have a quorum.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I turn to the Clerk.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay, we don't have a quorum. We're going to ring the bells.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. All right.

I'm going to return to the member.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Great. Thank you. It's great to see some government members back in the

House, Speaker, to debate their bill, their legislation, Bill 156.

I'm going to go back to what I was saying about consumer protection obviously being important, but it overlooks what the real underlying issue is. Reducing access to legal ways of obtaining emergency cash without providing consumers with a clear path to financial sustainability is likely to drive them to the illegal loan market, which is far more dangerous. People need to continue to have access to these services, including the cashing of cheques.

Not every recipient of government cheques can deposit them into a bank account. The reason why people who seek out these sorts of financial services are so vulnerable is because they are desperate and, quite frankly, they're out of options. That's why protection is so important, but it's also why we need to be mindful that this is a service driven by real need. The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry had it exactly right when he called these types of loans "an expensive lifeline."

What I would like to see from this government is some real effort toward improving the lives of the people of this province so that a missed paycheque or a car repair or an unexpectedly high hydro bill doesn't force them to make such tough decisions. We need to be promoting financial literacy so that people can make informed decisions about their credit and finances. Making conventional finance more accessible would be another way to actually help the disadvantaged people of this province. People who have only recently arrived in Canada or who have experienced negative credit events such as bankruptcy, missed payments or a consumer proposal are put in a compromised position because they can't access the banking services that we take for granted.

Payday loans are most often a symbol of a problem. They are a market reaction to an unmet need. We're getting to the end of April and I think that at tax time, we all have a renewed appreciation for how complex our financial system is. We have a very secure, highly regulated system that works well for most people and effectively minimizes costs and risks for consumers as well as financial institutions. Terms of service are built around keeping fees down for customers while giving banks security.

Providing short-term loans is often painted as a licence to print money, but the fact of the matter is that 10% of payday loans have to be written off. This is a much higher proportion than regular, credit-backed lending by banks. There is no credit check prior to receiving a payday loan. The only documentation needed is ID and recent pay stubs. This is in contrast to regular credit, where the decision to lend you money and the rate at which it is lent depends on an individual's credit rating.

The interest rates are exorbitant sounding, but the short repayment time means an interest rate of 35% would translate to about 1.16% on a two-week lending scale. Now, payday loans aren't an interest-based product, but I mention this because those high interest rates

are often used to demonize the practice of short-term lending.

The fees are really the devil in the details. The fees are very high for payday loans, but that is mostly because the risk is also very high. Again, there are some very bad apples out there, as I mentioned in the beginning, and I certainly don't intend to paint this industry as angelic. But it is important to understand both sides of this question and for government to work with this industry to preserve service while ensuring that consumers are adequately protected.

One of the provisions written into the Payday Loans Act that seems to tread on the toes of industry and which gives me pause is the allowance for government to step in, at their own discretion, and order businesses to stop providing financial services outside of payday loans. We're talking about related services here. Separating payday lending from offering prepaid credit cards or cheque-cashing would seriously disadvantage a business, since it would force them to rely on the riskiest side of their business—payday lending—without the cushion of the more secure income streams of services like cheque-cashing. It's also a much more expensive venture to offer just one of these services. In a competitive industry, this represents potentially extremely detrimental interference by government.

1630

I would also like to say that I think consumers would be better served by being tasked with finding one reliable alternative financial service provider rather than going to multiple businesses. Most people who use conventional finance rely on one bank, and I think that model of amalgamation is even more important in instances where financial literacy may be wanting. Of course, we don't want to see people getting pressured into using these services they don't need—and I think that's probably the intention of this regulation, but this may be overstepping the line and I think something that the government should pay attention to and hopefully something that can be dealt with at committee or at least discussed.

High-interest loans can absolutely have a terrible impact on the financially vulnerable. But some of these measures, like extending the time of repayment for repeat customers, seems like an idea hatched at the kitchen table rather than as a product of thoughtful study and consultation. Quite often, such terms are extended voluntarily, and, frankly, if we're talking about someone who has to keep taking out these types of loans, we're talking about someone who needs credit counselling, money management skills and possibly public assistance, not different payment terms alone. What I'm taking away from that particular change is that the government doesn't really want lenders extending third loans. They make that assumption because they're mandating that the lender take an increased risk and accept a slower rate of return, regardless of the likelihood of repayment. If that is the case, again, we're talking about limiting the availability of a last-resort service and offering no alternative.

The provision in the payday loans amendment act which prohibits lenders from opening another loan within

a certain time of the last loan's repayment is another question mark that I have. I don't see how this would impede someone from going out and taking a loan with another institution, so it really does very little to discourage cyclical borrowing.

The Toronto Star recently ran an article about the alternative financing industry and concluded:

"The payday lending business in Ontario, where the annual rate of interest on short-term loans exceeds 540%, is a black box. The target market: the unbanked, the underbanked, the vulnerable—and young workers with conventional bank accounts who can't make ends meet, paycheque to paycheque.

"It's time for the province to undertake a deep investigative dive into the industry, including undercover on-site inspections. So much has happened while some of us weren't paying attention."

We all want to make sure things are above board with this industry and that they're operating in a way that's ethical and accountable. We want people to be able to access these services the way in which it was intended: rarely and in emergencies. I think that's sensible; that's the approach that should be taken.

Many of the regulatory changes proposed in this bill seem to be window dressing. Besides not dealing with the underlying problems, there is redundancy here and more of a focus on making the government look busy on consumer protection than anything else. A common theme in the bills coming forward from this government is the expansion of ministerial powers. In this particular bill, this includes giving the minister power to regulate payday lenders by determining which factors a lender must consider before extending credit, capping the amount of money that can be borrowed, forcing a disclosure in writing of the evaluation of factors affecting a lender's decision to issue credit, banning lenders from contacting customers to offer refinancing and prescribing a grace period for rent-to-own contracts.

We can clearly see that the minister is going to have significant influence on how this industry does business here in the province of Ontario, all the way down to the content, size and location of advertising and signage for payday lending businesses. This sort of top-down micro-management from government seems to be getting more prolific under this Liberal government. Heavy regulation of this industry doesn't do anything to address the need that's driving it. I think we should also be focused on getting our economic fundamentals right—I've said that a number of times since I've been at Queen's Park—so the demand for and appeal of payday loans and these services goes down.

The government's initiative to impose harsher penalties on collections agencies that breach the law is a measure I'm absolutely onside with, but I do have concerns about provisions that would allow an individual to carry out the business of collecting debts without being registered here in Ontario. While I'm not familiar with the details of cases in which this regulation would be involved, this naturally sends up some red flags. If

collectors aren't registered, I would question their level of accountability and would like to know more about what is in place to prevent unsavoury measures from being taken to collect debts.

On the whole, this bill speaks of positive intent, but it just doesn't seem to tackle these issues in a serious, comprehensive way. Getting rid of payday loans won't eliminate the drivers of demand for them.

I just want to go back, because I do have a couple minutes—really, just to get back to the message. I think all of us agree that the government's approach to the economy and getting people away from using payday loans would be, first, financial literacy. I think that's an easy one. But I think the government has to focus on getting the fundamentals right, the economic basics right, in the province.

I know I've been demanding for four months now that this government release a complete list to everybody in Ontario of their corporate welfare schemes because I think, quite frankly, that's a failed policy of this government. In the weeks and months ahead, we're going to see more revelations come from this \$5-billion corporate welfare scheme. Instead of that approach of the government's, where they sit here in a ministry office and pick winners and losers from Toronto, from Queen's Park, I think they'd be better off to get the basics right: get hydro bills down, stop signing these expensive wind and solar contracts, and get serious about cutting red tape. For every business that I talk to in my riding, it's usually the second or third issue they mention. Hydro is always first.

Third, they need to create conditions for all businesses to succeed. In turn, with all businesses succeeding, wages are going to go up in the province.

There's one story I want to tell about this corporate welfare scheme and why it just really irritates—the approach that this government's taking. I have a business in my riding. The owner went out to get financing to build an expansion to his frozen food warehouse. Right when he was in the middle of building this expansion to a warehouse, there were leaked documents in the 2014 budget saying that his competitor was going to get a \$3.5-million grant from the Liberal government. So he called me up and said, "Why am I paying higher taxes all the time so that a grant can be given to my competitor to compete against me?" And this competitor was 40 or 50 miles down the road.

This is a failed approach. It's fine for them to go to local businesses, big companies across the province and have photo ops done, but it does nothing to help lift people out of poverty and it does nothing to help paycheques increase in the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Again, these would be questions and comments related through the chair to the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex based on the presentation that he has made this afternoon. Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to say to the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex that he made some good points on the effect on poverty: How is this going to help?

Frankly, Speaker, I've heard people in my community who don't use these services and have basically called them legalized loan sharks. The bottom line is that I probably have 30 to 40 of them in my riding, and 20% of the people in my riding are living below the poverty level. They use these—well, I don't want to call them businesses—stores on a regular basis between cheques. They'll get some free cards from a Walmart or somewhere, and they'll go in there and cash them in. They were giving them 30% of the value and they were walking out—if it was a \$100 gift certificate, they were giving them \$30. Then they would go and cash it or buy goods at Walmart and resell them or whatever they do. But the bottom line is, when you go from pay to pay, if you use what little substance you have—the whole group might be pulling in \$1,200 to \$1,400 a month—you can go through that pretty quickly with a large hydro bill or whatever other things you're facing, like food.

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Let's look at it this way, Speaker: You're paying the same price for a loaf of bread that those people on fixed incomes and lower incomes are paying. You're paying for the same gas—if they're lucky enough to have a car to drive; more like a moped. The bottom line is, there's no relief from month to month to month. And then these guys in these businesses pile up the interest rates, to the point where they're never going to get out of debt. This goes on and on, in a cycle that's got to be—let's look at Quebec; that might be a good idea. They don't have them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments related to the speech given by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex?

Hon. David Oraziotti: I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, who was mostly on topic during his discussion, although he introduced a number of other issues that were completely unrelated to Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act. I hope he'll focus his two minutes on the bill when he has an opportunity to close here in a few minutes.

Speaker, what I would say is that this bill is incredibly important to move forward. We know that from the time that the federal government downloaded the responsibility of this area to the provinces, and from the time that our government first introduced legislation, more specifically, around payday loans in 2008, we have continued to put in place improvements and supports for individuals that are the most vulnerable in the province, who from time to time access alternative financial services and payday loans.

This piece of legislation, I would say, is much broader and much more encompassing in this sector. We know that these organizations continue to reinvent themselves, if you will, and adapt the criteria and the products that they offer to consumers to attempt to drive profits for their organizations. We as government need to make sure that we have legislation and regulations in place that help to protect the vulnerable consumers in this province who access these services.

This bill includes areas of cheque cashing, instalment loans, rent-to-own services, as well as those with debts in collection and, of course, payday loans. I know that social service organizations have participated in many of the consultations. We've had consultations across the province, and we look forward to hearing the continued debate on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments with respect to the speech given by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech from the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex on Bill 156, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to financial services.

I did hear the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex talking about the endless cycle of debt and how Ontario citizens get into that, but he also did relate it to the current state of affairs in the province of Ontario: the fact that this government is, like so many citizens that find themselves using a payday loan, spending well beyond its means, which is the way a lot of individuals end up using payday loan businesses.

We see the Ontario government keep racking up the debt. They started out with \$140 billion in debt and this year we're going to be at \$308 billion in debt. They're paying huge interest costs, of course, even with low interest rates, so that this year, the third biggest item in the budget—if it was a ministry, we would have health care, then education and then the \$12 billion to pay the interest on the debt. So I guess my question is: What payday loan company is the Ontario government going to go to when the current institutions decide to stop lending them money?

The member also talked about the fact that life is becoming unaffordable in Ontario, and I totally agree with that. I see in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, where average incomes are below the provincial average, hydro is absolutely huge. We just heard that there's another hydro increase starting May 2, and I see constituents writing to me about that.

That's the sort of thing that drives people to use payday loan companies, because they can't afford to pay their bills, and it becomes a question of heating or eating. That's the current situation here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments with respect to the speech given by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'm pleased to make comments on the comments made by my friend from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. He talked a great deal in there about his concerns for the debt that these people face, and he always refers it back to the debt that the Liberal government has. Nobody, I think, in the House stands up more and reminds us of the size of the debt, the cost of borrowing, the cost of paying it back and what we're facing. He calls it the economic fundamentals.

The people using these payday loans are also struggling with the economic fundamentals of life. My

friend and colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek suggested that in Hamilton, there are 30 to 40 payday loan shops, and he's absolutely right. I found out today, for example, that Hamilton may be the Tim Hortons capital of Canada for, per capita, the number of Tim Hortons locations, but it's also, unfortunately, the payday loan capital of Canada, based on per capita population. That, I don't believe, is something to be proud of—not in any way to diminish the overall reputation of my good friends from Hamilton. But when you have that number of shops isolated in certain parts of the community, it certainly says something about the economics, the downturn in the economy and the downturn in certain neighbourhoods. When you see these signs, they don't encourage you to move into that part of town, because these aren't the welcoming signs put out by the welcome wagon, so to speak.

I'll shortly have 20 minutes to say more about this, Speaker. I look forward to that opportunity. I did want to comment that my friend for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex was right on when he said it's all about the debt.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments for this round.

I return to the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex to give him the opportunity to reply to the questions and comments.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It has been a pleasure to debate Bill 156 this afternoon. I'd like to thank my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, the distinguished member from Parry Sound, and the member, and my friend, from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Speaker, as elected officials—I said this when I was speaking during my 20 minutes—we have a moral obligation to do what we can to prevent bad situations from occurring when it comes to these payday loans. We've all heard stories about predatory practices from these lenders, and heart-wrenching stories of consumers who became trapped in an endless cycle of debt. I'm not going to deviate to what I said originally in my 20 minutes about the debt of the government. I think I spoke a bit about that. The story of struggling families and individuals being taken advantage of is a huge cause for concern, and many cities have considered measures, as I said, to deal locally with this issue.

But I do want to reiterate that I feel strongly that all of us, as MPPs, have a moral responsibility to turn Ontario around. We have to change the direction that we're going.

We've been here two years since the last election, Speaker. We have yet to see an actual jobs plan from this government, an economic plan to raise wages in this province and help people find better jobs, to lift people out of poverty. We're living in a province where we've had a government in power for 13 years, and we're recycling old ideas. We desperately need change.

I know that the people using the payday loans and these services are looking to us to bring about change in Ontario. I would urge the government to get the fundamentals right in this province.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's always an honour to be called upon and asked for my opinion in this provincial Parliament. The citizens of Windsor–Tecumseh have sent me here to speak on their behalf. As a New Democrat, as a member of the progressive opposition in this House, it is a pleasure to comment on Bill 156.

Now, the bill does have a fancy title, but if you ignore that, it is proposed legislation to deal with what we call payday loan operators. Another way of putting that is more regulation on the small-dollar credit market. Let me remind you that my friend and colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, our party's deputy leader, was way ahead of this bill back in December 2014.

That's when he introduced a motion that would have capped lending fees at these payday loan establishments at \$15 for every hundred dollars borrowed. Mr. Singh's motion would have extended the grace period for any loan to be paid off without penalty. He suggested the creation of a database that could be used to enforce a ban on rollover loans, and the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton also called on the government to work with credit unions and banks so that they could develop alternatives to the payday loan culture in low-income neighbourhoods. I note the Liberals did borrow one of his ideas and that this bill would extend the grace period for loans to be paid back without penalty.

Actually, Bill 156 falls short of delivering any real action at all. It's more of a wish list that the government hopes to address after they have done more consulting on it. There aren't a lot of details in here, and even the minister has admitted to that. Critics of this bill have suggested that it's little more than “an announcement about an announcement about an announcement.” Those aren't my words; those are the words of Mel Fruitman, a vice-president of the Consumers' Association of Canada. He says, “I hate it when governments” do this. According to Mr. Fruitman, they propose a bill that says, “We're going to do something but it's going to be a year before we do something and we can't tell you anything until we do it.”

Since we have some time, allow me to tell you about a really interesting document I discovered while researching what to say about this bill today. Speaker, you probably haven't heard about Cardus. It's a non-partisan think tank based in Hamilton. Among other things, Cardus is dedicated to the renewal of social architecture in North America. What initially caught my eye was an article published in the Windsor Star, titled “Reducing the Payday Lending Trap.” It was written by Brian Dijkema; he's a program director at Cardus.

His article was intriguing because it began with a glossary of terms that are sometimes associated with payday lenders. He actually said it reads a bit like a description of a B-grade horror film maybe on a poster outside a theatre, detailing what you could expect to see should you come inside to see the movie—predators,

thieves, vampires, slave drivers, or his favourite term, “rapacious usurers.” If those terms are accurate, they got Mr. Dijkema to thinking that if they’re so awful, and despite what seems to be a universal hatred for them, why have they popped up like mushrooms in certain neighbourhoods across most of Canada?

Well, his conclusion was that, yes, payday loans are awful but they can also be a lifesaver when the need for cash is urgent and credit from traditional sources is unavailable. He puts it this way: If you think of a family with a hydro bill in arrears and the local utility company is knocking at the door, threatening to disconnect the service—just say they owe \$200. If they go in for a 10-day loan at a payday branch, it will cost them \$42. If they don’t, and the hydro gets shut off, it will cost at least \$95 just to have that service reconnected. So in this case, not only is the payday loan the best option for credit; it actually makes economic sense—that is, of course, if they couldn’t qualify for a loan from a bank or a credit union, and if they didn’t have family or friends that could put up the money until the next payday.

Brian Dijkema and Rhys McKendry of Cardus wrote a 50-page research paper on finding ways to build an enabling small-dollar credit market. It’s titled *Banking on the Margins*. I highly recommend it, especially to the Liberals as they stumble through their next round of consultations dealing with this issue. Let me touch on a few more points from the original article that was published in the *Windsor Star*, and then I’ll get more in-depth with the Cardus research paper on the payday loan industry itself.

The industry, the small-dollar credit market, is designed in such a way—well, it’s like a teeter-totter. You sort of tilt customers away from short-term ruin into long-term debt. Research shows that payday lending is associated with increased family breakdown, negative health outcomes, increased crime and a host of other social ills. However, there’s a cautionary tale here because we’re dealing with the people on the margins of society. Simply doing away with payday loans or bringing in hard interest rate caps may help some, but it will also hurt others. What’s needed is a combined effort, much like the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton suggested nearly a year and a half ago—a joint effort between government, credit unions and the banking industry to come up with real alternatives.

Payday loans have been available in Ontario for 20 years. Across the country, it’s estimated that between 1.8 million and 2.5 million Canadians a year tap into the \$2.5 billion that’s been made available through payday loans.

Speaker, much of what I’ll be saying for the next little while comes directly from the *Banking on the Margins* report by Brian Dijkema and Rhys McKendry. It’s available on the Cardus website, and again, I highly recommend it, especially to the minister and the Liberal members across the aisle.

Payday lenders, according to a story in *Maclean’s* magazine, are an industry that “profits off the poor and bleeds users dry.” The *Walrus* likens payday loan users to “a gerbil trapped on a wheel” and users to addicts.

Opponents of payday loans argue the industry exploits the poor, taking advantage of those in vulnerable circumstances with predatory lending practices and usurious interest rates. Proponents believe payday loans are simply a market response to a real need.

Seven provinces have established regulations that allow payday lending. Quebec bans the industry outright. There is no regulation in Newfoundland and Labrador, and although New Brunswick brought in something eight years ago, it has never been put into law.

The cost of a payday loan, unlike loans issued by Canadian banks, does not change with the length of the term of that loan. In other words, if your next cheque from work comes in 10 days or 30 days from now, and that’s when you repay the loan, the cost of borrowing from a payday lender remains the same dollar amount.

In 2009, Ontario set a maximum fee on payday loans at \$21 for each \$100 borrowed. Remember, the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton would have lowered it down to \$15 from \$21. Speaker, that’s an effective annual percentage rate of 766.5% on a 10-day loan. That is a scary number. But compare it to the one in Nova Scotia: The fee there is capped at \$31 for every \$100 borrowed, and that is an effective annual percentage rate of 1,131% on a 10-day loan.

1700

Under current federal law, you can’t borrow more than \$1,500 on a payday loan and you can’t take more than 62 days to pay it back. In Ontario, the average payday loan is about \$460. In 2014, in this province, there were 800 licensed payday loan outlets operated by 250 different businesses. They issued loans estimated between \$1.1 billion and \$1.5 billion to 400,000 households. Evidence suggests the market has been saturated and the demand has been met.

Payday loans are where we turn if we don’t have a credit card or have maxed it out, if we don’t qualify for a line of credit, if we don’t want to put up an item of personal value at a pawnshop, or if we can’t or don’t wish to ask for a loan from friends or family. The sad, sad fact of life for many of us here in Ontario is that in order to keep a roof over our heads, in order to put food on the table, in order to buy our prescribed medications, put gas in the car, replace a muffler or buy a new pair of steel-toed workboots, we need a bit of money to get us through until our next paycheck comes in.

We may be working two or even three jobs: maybe one full-time and one or two part-time. For the most part, it’s precarious work with little or few benefits. But, like that gerbil on a treadmill, we can’t stop; we can’t slow down; we have to keep grinding away every hour, every day. That’s when we turn to the quick and easy solution.

Payday loan outfits are everywhere, especially in Hamilton, as I’ve mentioned. In some neighbourhoods, they’re on every corner. Municipal planners have a problem with that. They see these outlets with their garish signage as anchors holding a neighbourhood back, lowering property values and sending a message that this is not a community that you would choose to live in had you

the choice. There's talk in some planning circles of limiting the number of such establishments within a certain distance of each other.

Location, convenience, quick and easy access to money—payday loan outfits are where we turn if we need money in a hurry. These lenders call this “asset limited, income constrained, and employed.” The acronym is ALICE. Like Alice, when we sign on with these lenders, we go down a rabbit hole, only it's taking us down a spiralling staircase into deeper and deeper debt, from which many of us will never recover.

According to a payday loan survey of their Canadian customers, 68% had full-time jobs, 8% worked part-time and 2% were self-employed. A payday loan can be a lifesaver to the family in need, but when they can't get out of debt and keep coming back for more loans, they get trapped, like Alice, in a crippling cycle that leads them further down the economic ladder. It's in the best interest of the payday lenders that you remain in debt. That's their business. They have a clear profit incentive for you to keep coming back.

Speaker, the state of Colorado made some changes back in 2010. The state transformed the payday loan industry structure without reducing access to consumers. They mandated that all payday borrowers would have six months to repay a loan; introduced a three-part fee structure; gave consumers the ability to repay a loan early without facing a financial penalty for doing so; the most you could borrow was \$500; lenders could charge no more than 20% on the first \$300, and no more than an additional 7.5% on anything more than \$300; and the interest charge was capped at 45% a year.

So how did the industry respond? Well, initially, 60% of the operators closed up shop. The number of retail operations was cut in half. People still needed to borrow money, though, so the remaining outlets became more efficient. The number of borrowers at each store doubled. Loan revenue at each store increased by almost 25%. No one knows if we would have similar results here in Ontario with those types of changes.

Payday lenders aren't banks where you save money. They don't encourage you to save money or invest money. They want your loan business. There's an American survey that shows that 76% of payday loans are renewals, that 60% of their loans go to individuals who borrow 12 or more times a year, and the average customer is indebted for five months of the year. Ernst and Young has discovered that here in Canada, the average payday lender provides 15 repeat or rollover loans for every first-time loan. In BC, of 70,000 borrowers in 2014, 36% took out six or more loans and 43% borrowed more than 10 times. This is a system designed to create consumer dependency.

Payday lenders don't report to a credit bureau. That doesn't help those who borrow, because if they did and you always repaid your loan on time, you would earn a favourable credit rating based on your credit history, and that would make it easier to take out a loan elsewhere.

How can this system be fixed? How can this bill be amended so that it introduces real, meaningful change to

the lives of the people of Ontario who rely on the small-dollar credit market? The researchers at Cardus have some ideas. They say that we need a system where people can make payments that are affordable over a term limit that is reasonable. We need to have no doubts about the true cost of borrowing money, and that information must be written in such a way as to be clearly understandable. When we repay our loans on time, we should be rewarded with an option—should we choose, the next time we need money—to borrow to a little bit more money at a lower cost of borrowing. Loans should be made recognizing a borrower's ability to pay.

We need a marketplace where consumers can turn to an enabling credit option instead of a payday loan. That's where the government has a meaningful role to play. That's where our credit unions and our banks can step into the picture. That's where our community foundations can play a role. This would provide a viable alternative.

Mainstream financial institutions can play an important role in providing high-quality alternatives to payday loans. Banks and credit unions already have much of the existing infrastructure and operational expertise to deliver small-dollar loans to households. They're also built on business models that are much more aligned with long-term customer service.

The greatest barrier to the development of high-quality alternatives is the challenging economics of the subprime small-dollar credit market. These outlets have small profit margins and they deal with high-risk borrowers. It would be imperative to reduce the cost of providing such a service, and there would have to be a buy-in to the externalized social value created by offering such an alternative. They could do it online, with no frills. There would be real cost savings since there would be no main branch with counter staff, office rent, property taxes and so on. There's already an online alternative being offered in Canada that targets payday loan customers: MogoZip offers loans at half the cost of the location-based payday loan operators.

I see that I'm running out of time here, so I'm going to skip ahead. I won't give you the example in Australia where this happens, but I will say that if you get on a subway or a bus, there's all kinds of advertising space that isn't being used. Municipalities could make that available free to the alternatives to the payday loan operators. It takes political will by this government and others to help shape a new and more tolerable small-dollar credit market. Some say it's a pie-in-the-sky solution, but it can work. The feds have to step up as well to make it available. There's no easy solution to it.

There are examples out there that can do it. The conclusion to the paper written by Brian Dijkema and Rhys McKendry says that this country is a very prosperous country, but despite our wealth, many of us in Canada remain stuck in cycles of debt that restrain freedom and act as a ball and chain on the country's long-term vitality and economic prospects.

Let me just say that we must find ways to address the structural issues in the current system without restricting

access to small-dollar credit for those living on the margins.

Unfortunately, I'm out of time.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments related to the speech given by the member for Windsor–Tecumseh?

Mr. Bob Delaney: There's a part of me that says I was very much enjoying listening to my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh on a subject that we seem to be on the same page on. So while there's a part of me that says perhaps we should just let him continue, I think I can probably pick up largely where he left off, with only a slight nuance in my viewpoint, because I feel pretty much as he does on this particular bill.

The legislation that the government is considering is not for the well-educated and the wealthy and the people with a lot of connections. It's for people who have always existed at the margins of society—and I'm going to talk about an instance that I have spoken of in the House before that I remember when I was out in British Columbia, where I was dealing with some guys on a team I was playing with, and their approach to modern financial services.

The measures that this bill proposes are not those that would regulate financial institutions that deal with sums of money that have four, five and six or more zeros attached to them. They deal with small sums of money, with people who live at the margins, with people who are not well educated, and they are measures that are reasonable protections to ensure that the most vulnerable in our society are not nakedly exploited at interest rates that are absolutely usurious even though they sound like they are reasonable and affordable and that the place is sort of friendly, but really it's not. The interest rates are through the roof. The service isn't anything close to what a bank would offer. I'm going to pick this up again in my remarks, but I thank the member for his contributions and I look forward to moving forward with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Harris: I did also enjoy listening to the lead-off for the third party, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. He referenced a report and study done by Cardus. I've had the chance to meet with Cardus on several occasions; in fact, they have done a bunch of in-depth, thorough reports on a lot of important topics. I can think of one offhand: the competitive situation when it comes to open tendering here in the province of Ontario and the cost implications for taxpayers when it comes to labour monopolies in communities like my own of Waterloo region. But that will be a discussion for perhaps another day.

We are talking about an act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act and the Payday Loans Act: Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act.

I was just speaking to my colleagues here while we were in between things. If you walk from Bloor to

Wellesley in the morning, unfortunately, you see many of these establishments open early, and folks are in them accessing funds, of course, because many of them are using them as a last resort—those who have bad credit or no credit and who experience an unexpected expense or an unexpected drop in income.

I know we're going to have more time to discuss this, and I appreciate the minister bringing this forward. As I've often said here in question period, sometimes I wish the minister of consumer affairs would actually protect taxpayers from some of their own ministers and other pieces of legislation coming forward. I can think of many of those things. If you look at the Drive Clean program, the government made a recent announcement on that, but we had a bill recently, last session, that I asked a question on previously, and I didn't get much of an answer. But I'll save that for another time, Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh. He always brings new aspects to anything he deliberates.

I find that there's a part of this equation that's not being addressed. It's the amount of money that traditional banks and lending institutions make in a year—astronomical profits. You'd think that they'd be able to take a small percentage of that and use it to help people who are struggling from pay to pay in precarious loan situations. These "one-stop shops," as I like to call them—and people in my riding basically call them "legalized loan sharks"—are putting these people into debt that, as the member pointed out, they will never ever get out of. It's an ongoing cycle. But if some of our traditional lending institutions—even some of their rates are high, in my opinion, but some of their rates would be reasonable and steady and not increasing if you miss one payment after six months and it doubles, like these guys, or triples or quadruples in a year. They end up owing more than they actually borrowed, and they can't pay it off. It doubles and triples, to the point where, if they do have any assets, they put a lien on what assets they have. So it makes the cycle of poverty even worse.

In a country this wealthy, in a country this rich, and with the profits that some of these lending institutions make, you'd think they could take a little percentage—and I guess they call it a "high-risk loan," but isn't it worth it to lift these people out of constant poverty and the cycle of paying forever and ever? I think so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments related to the remarks by the member for Windsor–Tecumseh?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge and add a few more comments to the debate this afternoon.

I listened very carefully to the thoughtful comments made by the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. As I said before in this House, I know that all of us in our ridings have had individuals approach our offices regarding some of the issues with payday loans. I was listening

carefully, but I just really wanted to spend a couple of minutes about online payday loan applications. I know that this proposed legislation will help protect Ontario residents who engage in payday loans online. We hadn't talked about it till now, but I know that that was a question that has come forward before in some of the consultations that we've made broadly across Ontario.

The payday loans amendment act will apply to all payday loans if the borrower, the lender or the loan broker is located in Ontario when the payday loan is made. This is the case no matter how the payday loan agreement is entered into. The existing protections will apply to payday loans made remotely, such as online payday loans, and the proposed amendments would also apply to online payday loans. I think this is very important: to ensure that we have protection of consumers no matter how they enter into these agreements.

I also wanted to mention that there are community agencies who work directly with low-income Ontarians who are using payday loans. They advised us, during consultation, that it was preferable to have a safe payday loan rather than no small-dollar credit at all. Our approach takes into account these stakeholder views and our Ontario-specific circumstances.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the questions and comments. We look to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh to reply.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you to all the colleagues in the House who commented on what I had to say for those 20 minutes.

When I was talking to different people about this payday loan proposed legislation, one thing that stood out was with a young woman I talked to—she said, “What you could really do, if you want to help, is, in elementary schools and high schools, offer courses on financial management—how to run a budget, how to work within a budget—and get young people thinking about how they spend their money. Tell them about compound interest and other things and how money can build up, but that you also have to live within your means.”

When you realize how much it does cost to borrow, you can look at your spending priorities and all of that, but when you're out there and you have no other option, be it a payday loan or some other place to turn, then you're in trouble and you're spiralling down on a debt.

1720

I agree, as the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek said: Look at the big banks. They could offer, be it online or elsewhere, a no-frills, low-cost alternative. They would do it out of—well, call it the goodness of their heart. They would have to look at the social value to the communities that they make their big money from, putting back into the community, making these loans available at a reduced interest rate so that those of us who have to go to a payday loan operator wouldn't have to do that if the money was available from a credit union or a bank at a lower rate in smaller amounts—and looking at the ability to pay it back over a reasonable length of time. The big banks could do that. They'd still make money,

Speaker—not as much on this no-frills approach, but they still would make money by offering such a service to their communities.

Thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I will be sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke Centre and the member for Mississauga–Streetsville.

It gives me great pleasure to speak today on Bill 156. I was listening carefully to the speech by the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. I think that a lot of his comments, if not all of his comments, I agree with.

I could picture what the member was talking about, because in my community, around my office, on every block there is a payday lender. Yes, it's true: It's not a pretty scene, and I've been working very closely with the municipal councillors to do something about it, to try to control the number of these institutions that you have on one street. I hope that we will be successful.

The proposed legislation will strengthen consumer protection in the areas of payday lending, other alternative financial services and debt collection by protecting consumers who borrow from payday lenders. It's so important.

When I was the Minister of Community and Social Services—these people often don't have any other option, because they cannot get an account with a financial institution. I think that it's important today to call upon financial institutions to develop such a program. As the member for Windsor–Tecumseh was saying, they make a lot of money. The banks make a lot of money. It's important to support those who have no other means, to help them out, either by giving them a credit card that will be reloaded when they receive their welfare cheque or by other means. I call upon them to join the minister—and I wanted to congratulate the minister for presenting this bill to us today.

Some of my constituents are saying, “Why don't we just ban payday loans altogether?” Surprisingly, after consultation, there are quite a few community agencies working directly with low-income Ontarians who use these payday loans, and they advised us that it is preferable to have these institutions, to have a safe payday loan than to have no small-dollar credit at all. So the approach of the minister takes into account these stakeholders' views and Ontario-specific circumstances.

Again, talking about my municipal councillor and trying to find a way where we can limit, through zoning or whatever, for them to be able to pass a resolution to—and I know that he has been asking me this for quite some time: “What can you do at the province to help us limit the number of these payday loan institutions in the municipality?”

I hope that we will continue to work with the municipalities, because some of the municipalities wanted to have municipal bylaws in their municipality to limit payday lenders in their community. We will, as government, be monitoring that, and I hope that we will find a

solution. It's not okay to have—at every block on a stretch of the Montreal road, we have these institutions. I hope that we will be able to help the municipalities to control that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's an honour to follow the Attorney General in speaking to this important piece of legislation.

I'd like to share a little bit about my background and why I feel strongly about this bill. Those of you who were in the Legislature earlier may have heard me refer to this, but I wanted to repeat it and maybe expand on it a little bit in the time I have.

Prior to being in elected office, I was in business. My first full-time job out of university was working for Scotiabank as a commercial lender. In that role, what I used to do was lend money to companies, mid- and large-sized businesses, on behalf of the bank. One of the things that was ingrained in me early on, as part of the bank's training exercise of staff, and was ensured and enforced internally, was that we had to always make sure that the businesses we were lending to were very clear about what it was they were signing up for when they were borrowing money.

The people I was dealing with were very sophisticated, accomplished business people. They were folks who you wouldn't think needed protection. But the bank went out of its way, and certainly, I went out of my way, and the team I worked with went out of their way to make sure the client was always aware of what the implications of the loan were, what the implications of the loan could be for their business, and to make sure that there were no surprises further down the line. That was just good business practice.

Unfortunately, what happens too often is that there are folks who are, in this particular case, borrowing money from payday lenders, who don't enjoy that same level of due diligence on behalf of the lender, who don't enjoy that same level of protection that is put into place, both internally by banks but also through federal regulation legislation.

I think it's really important that we remember that we have to make sure that consumers who are borrowing money, particularly if they're borrowing money under urgent circumstances or under dire financial circumstances, have the information they need and have the protections they need, to ensure they can secure their financial future and their family's financial future.

There are a number of things here in this bill that I think are really important. There are a few highlights I'd like to point out. One of the things is trying to protect folks who are engaging in repeat borrowing. There are a few elements of this bill that are important, that would provide for an extended payment plan to consumers entering a third loan agreement in 62 days. If you're entering into multiple loans, you have an extended payment plan to protect yourself against loan payments that you couldn't otherwise pay.

There's a restriction on payday lenders from offering a loan to a borrower until seven days have passed since their last payday loan. That just makes sense to me. Restrict loan brokers from arranging a loan for a borrower until seven days have passed since their last payday loan. Again, these are ways of ensuring that people who are in dire financial straits aren't entering into financial contracts that could be damaging to them.

There are also a few things that are being done in this bill that ensure that consumers are better informed and can make more informed choices. One of the things that would be allowed through the bill is that this would govern the information to be attached or displayed around a good to be leased. This is in rent-to-own services, I'm talking about now. It would govern the right of a lessor to terminate the lease or would also allow for reinstatement of the lease.

1730

These are the kinds of things that, again, ensure that consumers are protected and have the power to be able to act in their family's best interest and don't get caught in a situation where they're borrowing money at very high rates and are unable to pay that back and fall into a cycle that leaves them and their families in a difficult financial position.

I think that, at the end of the day, what I want to get across is that we need to make sure that consumers are informed. This bill helps to ensure that borrowers are informed and it helps to ensure that borrowers have the protections that they need to make sure, should they be in a position where they're borrowing money on an ongoing basis from payday lenders, that they can protect themselves.

I think that that's responsible government. I think that's about standing up and looking out for our consumers. Like I said earlier, when I go back to my banking days, this was just part of due process and part of how we did business. I think it should be part of how the government ensures that people do business as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: When I was commenting a few minutes ago to the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, I indicated that I was going to address this topic, and I'd like to do that now.

I want to start with a story that happened to me back in the early 1980s when I was living in British Columbia. One of the sports teams that I was on at the time wanted to buy some new equipment. We had done all of our fundraising and all the rest of it. We had a team bank account. There were two of the guys, Glenn and Scotty, and their task was to go out and buy the stuff that we needed. All well and good so far.

It's a Saturday morning and my phone rings, and it's one of them. A they said, "Listen, we have an issue with buying all the stuff that we need." I said, "Well, what's your issue?" They started to say, "We have to get a cheque cashed," and I said, "Why? Just put it on a credit card and the team bank account will reimburse you."

"Well, I don't have a credit card." I said, "Come again?" I'm talking about two guys who at the time were in their early to mid-twenties. I said, "What bank do you deal with?" "Well, I haven't got a bank account." I said, "Where are you guys now?" "We're over at Glenn's house." I said, "Stay there."

So I drove over and I said, "Now, walk me through this." How did these two guys make ends meet from month to month? They would take their paycheques, which were issued in the form of a cheque, they'd put it in a drawer and when they needed money they would cash a cheque. And I said, "Really?" "Yeah." I said, "Haven't you ever had a bank account?"

Well, neither had ever had a bank account in their entire lives. I said, "Do you both do this?" "Yes." So trying to contain my frustration at the time, I said, "Boys, where are your cheques? We're going to deal with the equipment later in the afternoon, but first we have a problem. Get all of your deleted, deleted cheques." I went into both of their apartments with them and they literally opened a clothing drawer and grabbed out a sheaf of cheques, and there were a few that were in very great danger of becoming stale-dated.

I walked them down to the closest bank to them and I walked in and I said, "Sit." I went in and introduced myself to the bank manager. I explained the situation and I said, "These two guys are going to have their first bank accounts, and you are their first banker. We're going to fix this problem and you're going to lavish a little bit of care on them." He laughed and said, "Yeah, I get the point. Bring 'em in." It took the whole morning with these two esteemed gentlemen to have them get their first-ever bank accounts.

Now, unfortunately, they weren't the only ones in Canada and that wasn't the only time in our history that that happened. I bring up this story because it's very germane to this legislation here. That's the kind of people that this legislation aims to protect. It isn't possible for enough people to get to the vulnerable in our society early in life and say, "You need to have a bank account and you need to have a financial history."

By the way, you also need to file your taxes. The downside of not doing that, of being part of that grey market, is that you're going to deal with these payday lending institutions who are going to look at your paycheque and say, "What do I have to do to get 10%, 15%, 20% of that?" Why are you giving upwards of a quarter of your paycheque to someone for absolutely nothing when you can go into a bank and say, "If I have a bank account, this can be direct-deposited and I can withdraw money, and I'm not paying these horrendous fees?"

That's the problem that this legislation aims to fix, and those are the kinds of people—especially if you're one of those and you're listening to me, for whom we are trying to do this in order to, first of all, make the game that you're currently playing fair and, secondly, to educate you to the point that you look at these storefront payday loan places and say, "Do I really have to be doing

business with a firm like that?" The answer is, "No, you don't."

If what you really want to do is take this class of business and drive it out of business, no one will be sorry to see them go. But most importantly, the best way to do it is for people to learn a degree of financial literacy, to open up a bank account, to establish a credit history, to make sure you file your income taxes every year, and—lo and behold—if you do that and you have an RRSP and whatever else, you'll ask yourself, "Why would I have ever used one of those stores before?"

For those who do, what Bill 156 is proposing is a series of amendments and new rules that seek to make the game, as it's played now, as fair as it possibly can be. You're still going to pay far too much money if you deal with these payday lending institutions. You should still have an account with an established bank. You should still have a bankbook at home and you should still do all of those things that establish your credit history and that cause you not to need to deal with that. You should have a proper credit card and you should learn how to use credit.

But if you're still stuck in this cycle, we would like to see you out of this cycle and we would also like to see you not be so nakedly taken advantage of by a sector that grew because it wasn't well regulated. We're going to put a framework of regulation around it so that the most naked of manipulation can no longer happen, and the kind of people who gravitate to them—people who may be new to the country, who may have a below-average education, who may not, for one reason or another, have entered the Canadian financial system—will at least be playing on a level playing field.

Whether it be in collection and debt settlement, whether it be in consumer protection, whether it involves cheque-cashing and the fees to cash government-issued cheques—let's look at that. If you walk into a normal bank, it should cost you nothing to cash a government-issued cheque. Even better: If you've got a bank account, you don't need that government-issued cheque because the government will direct-deposit it into your bank account. You can just look at your statement online and there it is, and it happens a lot quicker, too.

Whether it be that or whether it be instalment loans or rent-to-own services or things that prevent the payday loan companies from simply rolling over loans so that they can continue to charge you rates that, if you calculate them out, maybe it's 20 bucks over such-and-such a period of time—but that's a small amount of money that it's 20 bucks on.

What would that be, if you project it out over a year? What interest rate would you be paying? Well, no one is actually going to tell you that, except in the tiny mice print at the bottom of the poster or buried on the last page of the contract. If you look it up, you're going to find that you're paying upwards of half of the proceeds of the loan in interest, which is insane.

What this bill is proposing is means to ensure that people who are currently dealing with payday loan insti-

tutions can at least get a basic level of consumer protection. My purpose in standing here, once again, is to say: If you are dealing with payday loan institutions, are you sure you're dealing with the right place? Maybe if you walk down the street with that paycheque, before going into a payday loan place, pick the Canadian bank of your choice—we have the best banking system in the whole world—and walk in and say, “Excuse me; here’s my ID. I’ve been dealing with such-and-such a shop down the street. You may be able to offer me services that they can’t. I’d like to have a bank account with you. Will you do that?” Almost certainly, whoever is doing the reception at the bank is going to say, “Absolutely. Sit down. Can we get you a cup of coffee or a glass of water? My bank manager would like to meet with you. No doubt about it, we can set you up so that when your government-issued cheque is due to you, it’s automatically deposited in your bank account and you won’t have to deal with the firm down the street. And if your employer does a direct deposit, you won’t have to deal with the storefront shop down the street. You can deal with us, you can take your money out at our ATM and you can do it by paying us, the banks, a lot less”—imagine this; I’m talking nicely about Canadian banks—“than what you’re paying the people with the colourful shops down the street.”

That’s what this bill is really about. I hope it gets speedy passage.

1740

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I’m glad to have heard the government’s discussion on this bill. However, I think what Ontarians need to see is why people are having to access these quick payday loans.

If you look at my riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London, since this government has been in power—actually, since 2007—my riding alone has lost 6,000 high-paying manufacturing jobs. Ford left, Timken left, Sterling left, and all the feeder plants are gone—due to their policies, the way they’ve driven this economy.

The member talks about people having to give to their RRSPs. People don’t have money for their RRSPs. People have a hard time buying their food, let alone paying for the energy rates that have shot through the roof over these past few years. It’s no wonder they’re having to find their own way to find some money to get by month to month. Unfortunately, they end up in a vicious, ongoing cycle.

The other thing I thought was interesting was how they talked about the horrendous fees these people have to pay. I only need to look, through 13 years of this government, at the horrendous fees that Ontarians now pay for their drivers’ licences, their hunting licences, their fishing licences. Speaking to a couple of farmers, the vehicle licence fees on farms today are through the roof.

Unfortunately, the \$300-billion debt that this government has created is costing the average person \$22,000

each to pay down. One billion dollars a month goes to pay for interest charges. So this government wanting to come out and regulate to protect people, that’s fine, but I think they need to regulate themselves to protect Ontarians, because we can’t afford you much longer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I listened to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville and he made some good points. I hope that when the bank manager sits down with the new client, they explain all the hidden service charges that banks are famous for. It may be a lot less, but there could be a lot more of them. So I’m not quite sure that they’re so innocent when it comes to protecting the consumer, in reference to what they have to pay. At the end of the year, we read in the paper about all the hundreds of millions of dollars they make in profit. They aren’t getting that from being nice guys; they’re getting it from the consumer.

Banks certainly could be a little more flexible when it comes to loans—short-term loans or long-term loans—for people who cannot get traditional banks, credit unions or places like that to lend to them because they are considered high risk. A lot of times, high-risk people—a lot of them are honourable people who want to pay back their debt. But when they get these rolling interest rates that after so many days double, and by the end of the year, you owe five times as much as you borrowed—you’re never going to get out of debt, and it keeps going on and on and on, to a point where it becomes so socially unacceptable that some go to drastic measures to get out of those debts. That’s unfortunate, because you never want to put people in a position where there’s no light at the end of the tunnel.

I think this goes on on a regular basis in our society. They call these guys predatory. Well, that’s putting it mildly. As I said before, I’ve had many people in my riding call them legalized sharks, and that’s what they are. Unfortunately, like I said, in my city, these places are cropping up at every intersection. We’ve probably got 30 to 40 of these types of situations in our city of 350,000 people, in the downtown Hamilton area, so it’s pretty sad.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville for his very interesting comments on banking and payday loans.

I wanted to add a little bit about the whole issue of debt collection: what happens if you get these payday loans and you get into this cycle of loans and it gets turned over to a collection agency. It could happen with your credit card out of control, that people get turned over to collection agencies. So we are also proposing to update the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act. One of the things that’s in there is a one-liner in the description—to enable administrative monetary penalties. It’s just one line and a few words, but it makes the biggest difference.

We ran into this with the old Day Nurseries Act. In order to enforce it if somebody had broken the act, you had to go to court. I think the debt settlement act is very similar. If the government is enforcing, you need to go to court to enforce. By introducing administrative monetary penalties, people who break the collection agencies act can actually be fined. That makes all the difference in the world, because if people think the government is going to have to take them to court, that's really, really expensive. If there's a minor infraction, it can cost so much to try to enforce it through the courts that it becomes, "Well, that's not really worthwhile." If you have a fine, on the other hand, that can be imposed administratively without going to court, and there will be a whole lot more capacity in the future to enforce the rules.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to join the debate this afternoon on Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act.

This is basically a bill that's more about micromanaging than creating a safer and more informed consumer environment in Ontario.

The thing is that these businesses exist for a reason. I listened intently to what the member from Mississauga was saying; it was kind of like Storytime with Uncle Bob there for a while. I'm curious to know what the guys wanted to spend their money on that Saturday morning. But these businesses do exist for a reason. He indicated that the big banks would be happy to take on this type of clientele if given the opportunity, but I think the reason that these businesses exist is because the big banks aren't necessarily interested in this type of service. That's why these payday loan stores exist.

There are a lot of them in my riding of Prince Edward–Hastings, and it seems like more of them are popping up all the time. But if they don't exist, where people can actually go in with their cheque and meet with somebody in the store face to face, there are Internet loan sites out there that are offering the same type of service. There's organized crime that's operating similarly as well.

So I think these stores do exist for a reason. I understand that they should be regulated; they should be limited as to how much anyone can use them. There should be those types of restrictions in place. And at the end of the day, we do need to see some amendments to Bill 156 before we'll support it at second reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the government members can reply.

I'm pleased to recognize the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I thank my colleagues for their helpful contributions. I think all three parties are pretty much onside on this.

To my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London, I think the key point I'd like to mention to him is, let's help people get into the financial system. If they can manage a bank account, then they can also manage on

ServiceOntario their driver's licence, their health card and their hunting licence as well.

1750

My colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek pointed out some things that I've heard him talk about before: Banks are very fallible; banks have their faults. But this is a bill about getting fairness for users of payday loans. The member used the expression "legalized loan sharks." I personally think he may be on to something there, and I wouldn't really seriously challenge the characterization.

To my colleague from Guelph: The path out of collection agencies and revolving payday loans with their sky-high fees is now, and has always been, about reform and education. She has pointed out a number of measures in the education system that serve as good precedents and models for what this bill is trying to do, and I very much agree with her.

My colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings brought up a few points too. Just as an answer to the questions that he asked, now that it doesn't matter some—what is it?—35 years later: broomballs, brooms and uniforms.

I think this is a bill that we should get out of this chamber and get passed as soon as possible so that we can protect some of the people that we've all been speaking of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I, too, appreciate the opportunity to say a few words about Bill 156. Much of our debate does concern the previous Payday Loans Act of 2008. That would be about the time the McGuinty government took over responsibility for this sector in our economy from the federal government.

Clearly, as we've been hearing this afternoon, payday lending is obviously a last resort for so many people who've got either bad credit or no track record of credit at all, or who have experienced an unexpected drop in income. I think of the stereotype of a bad day at the track; if co-workers or friends aren't able to bail them out, they would be tempted to walk into one of these storefronts.

There are also statistics that many people walk in to these shops after an unexpected drop in income. I think of so many people who have returned back to Ontario from the West, those who were working in the oil industry. Anybody who spent any time at the Toronto airport around Christmas time—there were so many dedicated flights coming right in from Fort McMurray. You could see these young fellas, and older men for that matter; you could tell this was the last trip back from the West. They would've had mortgage payments out there, payments on their truck and some pretty serious problems. Then, they walk into one of these businesses, and then, as we've been hearing this afternoon, the real problems begin.

We're told this is not meant to be a regular source of funding. However, somebody who's, regrettably, addicted to this source of funding gets involved—somewhat akin to the doctor shopping that we do see with someone addicted to narcotic analgesics. You may get cut off at

one particular payday lending company, but in so many areas—and they do seem to be clustered in neighbourhoods—you can merely walk across the street and pick up that second or third or fourth loan. So you can cut off a repeat customer, but there seem to be ways around it to access yet another loan to compound on the previous borrowing.

We've certainly heard this afternoon that there's a need for this. It's incumbent on legislators here to ensure that people still have access to some type of service like this, cashing cheques, for example—in many cases, perhaps in most cases, government cheques. It raises the question, and I do have a question: With respect to government cheques, are we referring to welfare cheques? Are we referring to cheques from Ontario Works and ODSP? Those cheques come from a ministry that allocates \$10 billion a year. What percentage of that \$10 billion a year, for really no good reason, is going to this payday loan industry? Might there be a better way for taxpayers—for our society—to assist those who are vulnerable beyond giving them a cheque which they don't know what to do with other than to walk into one of these storefronts and, in many cases, see a very large percentage of that money get skimmed by the payday loan shop? Apparently, so many people who receive these government cheques don't have a bank account and even the industry itself tells us that to cash a cheque or to do business there, you have to have ID, you've got to be 18 years old and prove you have a steady job, although I think a lot of these requirements are fairly flexible.

Obviously, we've got to address this issue. The industry has a responsibility to deal with government, which they do. I put responsibility—I think this was mentioned as well—on the federal banking system and the provincial credit union system. I think there's a lot more that they could do. They could step forward to better serve what I consider quite vulnerable customers.

For example, we know that the federal Criminal Code of Canada makes it illegal to charge more than 60% a year for a loan. Now, this deal was made during the McGuinty era and essentially sidestepped that. It's a criminal offence to lend money at more than 60% a year. We know there are people out there who aren't regulated. This Payday Loans Act, which goes back to 2008, has established a system where, in the province of Ontario, people are not limited to that criminal offence of

charging more than 60% a year. They can charge up to well over 500% a year.

I have an article here from the Ottawa Business Journal. It's titled "The True Price of Payday Loans," and it begins, "If you think interest rates on credit cards are too high, think again." They talk about hundreds or thousands of people in the Ottawa area who pay more than 500% in annual interest to get a loan, and they point out that it's perfectly legal to do this. A little more detail: "If you borrow, say, \$300 for two weeks, and repay the loan in full and on time"—which doesn't often happen—"you will pay as much as \$63 in interest." That's 21% for two weeks, and that's just the beginning.

I know my business partner in the farm a number of years ago was setting up a hog operation—we were in partnership for corn—and this was in the early 1980s when interest rates were close to 21%. I think, regrettably, with his farm business plans, he built one barn. I was thinking of going into the business myself, but not at 21%. No farmer could really survive at 21%. We're talking over 500%, annualized.

The article goes on to say: "A rate of 21% for two weeks works out to an annual interest rate of 546%. And that's before compounding and any late-payment fees." And there are other fees in this industry.

Now, I don't think there's evidence of somebody taking out a payday loan for two weeks and then another concurrent two weeks and another concurrent two weeks, up to 52 weeks straight, so that the industry can argue, "Well, there isn't annual compounding." But we use these comparatives—and one way to measure the financial status or the lending status of any organization: Take a look at the annual interest rate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

ANNUAL REPORT, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I adjourn the House for the day, I wish to inform members that the 2014 annual report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario has been laid upon the table.

It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Brown, Patrick (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	
McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	
Mileczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint du gouvernement
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	Scarborough–Rouge River	

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Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Ann Hoggarth, Peter Z. Milczyn
Daiene Vernile
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Amrit Mangat, Cristina Martins
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qaadri
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Bob Delaney
Randy Hillier, Michael Mantha
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Granville Anderson, Steve Clark
Vic Dhillon, Sophie Kiwala
Jack MacLaren, Michael Mantha
Eleanor McMahon, Monte McNaughton
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

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Chris Ballard, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Peter Z. Milczyn, Julia Munro
Lou Rinaldi
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**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Indira Naidoo-Harris, Bill Walker
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**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Lorne Coe
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Marie-France Lalonde, Gila Martow
Kathryn McGarry, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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of Ontario

First Session, 41st Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 41^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 19 April 2016

Mardi 19 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 19 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 19 avril 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): During the next two days, the House will be paying tribute to deceased members Gary Leadston and Peter Kormos. I ask all members to have their memories in their minds during prayers this week.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA MODERNISATION DES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 14, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 181, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Good morning, everyone. I'm pleased to be with you this morning to further debate Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act, 2016. The bill is proposing, as it stands now, to implement a ranked ballot system starting in 2018. There are a few details that are missing, so we're a little concerned about that.

My colleague from Oxford is our critic for municipal affairs and housing. He did a great hour leadoff speech, which is sometimes difficult to do on topics, but there's always lots to speak about in regard to municipalities. He highlighted—and this is repeated constantly in the Legislature; certainly by members of the opposition it is—the lack of public consultation that was required before municipalities can change to a ranked ballot election.

What worries me is that the minister has made comments on this issue that actually overlook the concerns of a lot of our municipalities. He said on record that “any municipality can hold a referendum on any issue. Some may choose this route. So be it.” How can that be it? If we're going to be redesigning our local democratic process, we need more protection than “so be it.” I think it's pretty naive and, I will say, a tad condescending, and it certainly runs contrary to what the Premier has said

herself. She has said before that the Liberal Party was the one that championed open discussions on our municipal elections.

When this bill goes to committee, I certainly look forward to the government waking up and realizing that this Legislature should work with municipal officials to ensure that the bill reflects what they need to run modern, accessible, democratic and effective municipal elections. How can we have sections of the legislation be overruled by regulation despite going through this entire process in this chamber?

I'm also concerned that the bill currently contains no requirement for a referendum before changing the electoral system. I think there's a bit of a déjà vu there with what's going on federally and what they propose also.

But back to the provincial here: In 2007, the minister responsible for democratic renewal said that when it comes to the issue of provincial referendums, “Our democracy belongs to its citizens, and it is the voters of this province that should decide how their representatives should be elected.” I remember that election campaign because the referendum question of changing how we elect members was on that ballot, and there were a lot of long discussions at doorsteps explaining the mixed-member proportional representation alternative, especially in rural Ontario, where they actually want to directly elect their representatives and know who they are. That I remember as being a long campaign. Other issues were involved, but that was a long one that was quite a discussion at the doorstep. In fact, I know that Toronto city council passed a resolution, in October 2015, recommending that the province not proceed with amending the Municipal Elections Act to provide for ranked choice voting, and that if the province did proceed with this change, it should only be permitted after holding public consultations and a referendum.

I've come across several research papers that rightly point out that neither our Constitution Acts of 1867 nor 1982 recognize municipal governments as an order of government; that our towns, cities, villages and hamlets are simply creatures of the province. I get that a lot in my communities, and it is true; and I explain a lot that municipalities are the product of the provincial Legislature.

But times have changed, and now municipalities are taking on more and more responsibilities, even within the limited capacity of their small budgets. Scholars and academics have argued repeatedly that municipalities should be recognized as a competent and mature level of government. Now we see this government making unilateral changes without any sense of comprehensive or adequate

consultation, and without putting this issue directly to the people it will affect.

On the issue of third-party advertising, the bill proposes to have third-party advertisers register with a municipality, display their name and contact information on signs, and be subject to contribution and spending limits. Campaign contribution restrictions, including municipal bylaws to prohibit contributions from trade unions and corporations, would also apply to third-party advertising.

In order to register as a third-party advertiser, an individual, trade union or corporation must be an eligible contributor in that municipality. This means that when those parties are prohibited from contributing, they are also prohibited from registering as third-party candidates. Registered candidates and political parties are prohibited from registering as third-party advertisers. That's a lot to say so early in the morning, Mr. Speaker.

Although Bill 181 touches on third-party advertising, it does not prevent campaign contributions from unions and corporations. It simply gives municipalities the authority to pass a bylaw restricting these contributions. Also, donations up to \$25 will now not be considered contributions. There will also be a new spending limit on holding parties and other expressions of appreciation after voting closes.

The registration for municipal elections will now begin on May 1 instead of January 1. I know that, certainly in the big cities, everyone is waiting to see who is actually going to put their name forward on the first day of January. Now, that's going to be moved to May 1. That does address concerns that the municipal campaign is too long.

The nomination cut-off on the fourth Friday in July could have a very negative impact on people who want to run for council and will actually result in a longer writ period. For those watching at home, that means a longer period for the official campaign—usually those who are watching at 9-something in the morning on a Tuesday would know what a writ period is.

Anyway, municipal employees who want to run for local office will now have to be off the job and without pay for 13 weeks, up from the previous six weeks. That creates a huge barrier to running for office, and I don't think the government or anybody in the Legislature really wants more barriers to running for office.

Having municipal elections for a minimum of 13 weeks, which is more than three months, makes it difficult for people who have to take such a long leave of absence. Unfortunately, this hurts so many local leaders, and I will bring up volunteer firefighters as an example. Bill 181 will remove the leave of absence exemption for volunteer firefighters, meaning that if they run for municipal office, they will be unable to volunteer for that same period of time.

0910

This hurts our local communities. Especially in rural Ontario, we are short of trained people needed to fight fires and save lives, and we rely heavily on volunteer firefighters. This is something that definitely should be

addressed. In fact, I was just at one of my many volunteer appreciation dinners on the weekend, and the great number there were the volunteer firefighters that are so praised up in Wilberforce, in my township of Highlands East. This is such a serious issue, and it will have a real effect on our communities and on our people. That's just one example of the consequences that legislation can have without adequate consultation and input from the public.

I'm going to speak quickly; I have only a minute left here, Mr. Speaker. On the issue of filing financial statements, Bill 181 would see the nomination fee being refunded for candidates once the financial statements and auditor's report are filed with the clerk. Currently, if a candidate fails to file their financial statements and auditor's report on time, they are automatically removed from office and unable to stand in the next election. This measure is not strong enough. I'm glad that Bill 181 does address this issue somewhat, so that if someone misses the deadline, they could file in the 30 days after paying the clerk a \$500 late fee.

There are some other positive changes that the bill is proposing, but as a whole, especially on the issue of ranked ballots—we should still see this question put directly to the people. The bill does, in some parts, strengthen accountability requirements by having the clerk make an accessibility plan and adding a new requirement for the post-election accessibility report to be made public.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time that I've had this morning—a little shorter than I thought—to speak to Bill 181, and I look forward to comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to be able to rise this fine Tuesday morning and add comments on Bill 181, which is the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I think that when we see bills come through like this we hope that it encourages engagement. I don't know how many people are watching this morning, on a Tuesday morning, but they are already the engaged. So this conversation really is for those in the broader public.

To the comments from my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, she had made the point that if we are going to be protecting our democracy, we need more from the government than—I think the words were, “So be it.” We need full investment and commitment. We talk a lot about consultation in this House, whether we're saying that there isn't enough and the government promises that there will be—and then there isn't and it isn't significant enough or it isn't widespread enough. But when we're talking about “modernizing” or maybe “optimizing” or whatever the buzzwords are—but improving and strengthening our democracy, we need everyone involved. Our municipalities should be having full input.

I didn't quite catch the comment from the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock about municipalities being treated like—you didn't say “treated like grown-ups,” but given the full credit that they deserve for

the important level of government that they are and really bringing them in, because this is about them, about their communities, how to make democracy more accessible.

I should mention the accessibility plan, that we want to reduce barriers. But I think that part of engaging in the democratic process isn't just about sheer numbers; it is about the issues, it is about what is accomplished.

I know that my colleagues will be talking a lot about the third-party advertising and that piece. I'm out of time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I listened with great interest to the comments by the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. She wasn't part of the former government when in her own riding I remember people were crying. Faye McGee from Fenelon Falls said, "Why are you forcing amalgamation on the people of Fenelon Falls?" Your former government created this megacity that nobody wanted. All of the rural municipalities said, "We don't want the megacity of Kawartha Mistakes," as they used to call it. They wanted independent, small municipalities, and you didn't listen to all the people in your area.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: Excuse me. You weren't part of the government.

The same thing happened in Hamilton. They made this megacity of Hamilton through into Aldershot and Dundas. The people in those communities said, "Please, we don't want this megacity. Government, please listen."

In Toronto, we had a massive referendum; thousands voted. They all said no megacity; the former government said, "We don't care what you say, local municipalities—East York, York, North York—we're making the megacity."

In Ottawa, the same thing: They made the biggest municipality in the world in Ottawa and the people said, "Wow. This is too big a city. How are we going to get real local democracy when you create this mega monster city of Ottawa?"

This legislation is not perfect, but I just want to give a bit of history about people who preach about local democracy, respecting municipalities, when I know full well—I was in this chamber when small municipalities, rural municipalities, came here and pleaded to be heard and the former government said, "No. We know what's best. You're getting your megacities. Just be quiet. We know what's best." And they moved on.

So, please, just a little bit of historical perspective here. This bill at least tries to open it up a bit for some more input.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's always a pleasure to rise to debate in the assembly, particularly when my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock has provided us with, I think, a sound debate with good ideas on the floor of the assembly.

Of course, I'm very disappointed in the member from Eglinton-Lawrence. He wants to talk about a government

decision from four governments ago. At some point, this Liberal government has to take responsibility for its own actions and the way it treats municipalities across this province.

In defence of my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, she's got a beautiful riding. She has a riding that has been attacked by this Liberal government with respect to horse racing, with respect to casinos and modernization. They're also talking about hydro rates, which is very important because she also comes from a community, not dissimilar to mine, where local decision-making was stripped from municipalities by the Green Energy Act and they were forced to deal with unwanted wind turbines in her community.

If we want to talk about local government and respect for local government, I think the member opposite might want to be aware of what his government has done to rural municipalities, and even urban municipalities like mine in Ottawa, across this province.

I'm also getting very disappointed with this Liberal government each and every day I stand here. When a Progressive Conservative or a New Democrat comes up with an idea, it is immediately panned by the members opposite. They don't take any criticism seriously. They don't think the thoughtful points that we bring forward on behalf of our constituents and our stakeholders are relevant. I'm here to say, Speaker, that my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes actually did bring forward some valid points and I think that the Liberal government would be best suited and well-informed if they would work with her, work with our leader, work with our critic on some of these matters of the day, particularly as it pertains to Bill 181, but there are a number of other issues where they could learn a little bit from this side of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's a pleasure to rise, as always, to bring the voice of my constituents from Windsor West and to speak about Bill 181, which I had an opportunity to speak a little more in depth to last week, during debate. I think that there have been a lot of great points brought forward from the two parties on this side, the two opposition parties. The member from Nepean-Carlton really summed it up nicely when she said that perhaps the Liberal side of the House needs to be listening to this side of the House, because as I've pointed out in previous debate, we are here to bring the concerns of our constituents—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please.

I would ask the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke—you're in direct line with the Speaker. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's the job of all MPPs, regardless of what party you are from, whether it's New Democrats, whether it's Conservatives or whether it's Liberals, to represent your constituents and bring the voice of your constituents to the chamber. It's unfortunate because

we've seen over and over and over again more frequently that the government side is not listening to this side of the House.

Not only are they not listening to this side of the House, but when we do have constituents come forward and speak to the government, they're not listening to the constituents—the stakeholders—when they come to them directly. That's one of my concerns about this bill: They are ramming it through without fulsome consultation. How much time have the stakeholders actually had to have a say in this legislation?

0920

I seem to recall that last week, when I was up for debate, they were saying, "We consulted beforehand." That's great: Get some ideas beforehand. But once you've actually drafted the legislation, it's important to go back to the stakeholders and say, "This is what we've come up with. Is this what you were thinking of? What concerns do you have about it? What good things do you see in this bill?"

I think that it would serve the government well to actually listen to those of us on this side of the House and the stakeholders who come forward when they want to be part of consultation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now back to the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the members from Oshawa, Nepean-Carleton and Windsor West.

The member from Eglinton-Lawrence: There's lots of history to be learned in the last 13 years that you've been here in government. You had an opportunity to do some things in my riding, but you chose not to—or your minister over there, and I won't get into names; the minister is not here anymore—on municipal affairs when you first got elected there in 2003.

My colleagues have made good points about not listening to our municipalities, and that is our obligation here in the Legislature: to bring forward the concerns of our municipalities. The member for Nepean-Carleton listed off a long list of things that they have done in rural municipalities—taking out our horse racing, and taking out our slots at racetracks and giving them to the bright lights of the city of Peterborough and the possible new casino. We're still going to fight that.

Industrial wind turbines: My goodness, how much do we have to continue to fight at that—

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm getting a signal here. Through the Speaker, I say to the Legislature: Industrial wind turbines are being forced upon rural municipalities, in environmentally protected areas and beside airports. I know that Peterborough Airport, which actually is in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock—proposed industrial wind turbines by airports that have flight schools.

None of this makes sense, and this government has heard from us on all these topics. As per what has been going on for several bills, not just for Bill 181 today, they

have not listened to either the opposition parties or the people in our municipalities. And guess what? We're citizens of Ontario too, and we deserve to be listened to.

I end on that, Mr. Speaker, and hope they make changes to this bill at least.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? The member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's my turn now. Be quiet, you.

Mr. Speaker, good morning to you. It's a beautiful morning outside. I enjoyed my walk into Queen's Park this morning.

Just think about it: Two years from now, we're going to be potentially putting this piece of legislation into action.

Over the weekend, I met with the Algoma municipal leadership across Algoma-Manitoulin. In my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin, we have 37 municipalities. I can tell you with pretty good certainty, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act, was not discussed with many of them, because—

Mr. Mike Colle: Why not?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm going to tell you.

I was standing with them. We talked about various other pieces of legislation that were going through the House, which they were aware of. When I talked to them, I looked at them all. There were roughly about, I would say, 15 to 20 municipalities in one room. I asked everybody, "How familiar are you with Bill 181?"

I don't know if you've ever had this drive, Mr. Speaker, but sometimes, when you're driving through my riding late in the evening, your lights will hit a whole bunch of eyes, and they're deer eyes. They don't know where to go, and that's what happened during that discussion: A lot of those mayors or even councillors were not aware of what this was going to do. They're very much in favour of having some reform. They know that it's coming. But some of the suggestions that have come through this piece of legislation are quite concerning, particularly in my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin, and for other members across the north and within smaller municipality structures.

One of the things that is really concerning is the potential impact that this might have on community firefighters. We wear various hats within our communities. I see my friend across the way, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. You know what I'm talking about. Many of these individuals are not only your volunteer firefighters. Some of them are the mayors. Some of them are your councillors. Some of them are your individuals that are sitting on the school boards. Some of them are your recreational-activity individuals.

This is somewhat concerning in this bill. We need to make sure that those community leaders are extremely well consulted about the negative impact that this might bring to their communities, because we have limited resources in our communities. It's not that our resources are any better or any worse. It's just that our resources,

and the individuals that are there, we rely on them on a regular basis to step up and take care of those communities.

I want to try and cover a few other things within my short time that I have here this morning, Mr. Speaker.

This bill was greeted with some enthusiasm by people in my community and by progressives everywhere in this province, who do see some of the benefit of ranked balloting. New Democrats support reform that strengthens local democracy and removes the influence that comes with big money in municipal elections. However, ranked ballot provisions are packaged in Bill 181 with a number of other initiatives that do raise concerns.

In particular, we are very concerned about the third-party advertising provision. Also, the general public has not been given enough information on this bill. We certainly want to make sure that that third-party advertising is not intended to silence individuals or organizations within our community. That's what we want to make sure doesn't happen, and that's why this needs to be a greater discussion. Everyone who sits here knows well that the Liberal track record on respect for democracy has been poor. Whether it is one of their past large scandals or recent revelations of big-ticket fundraising—even in events in order to meet fundraising quotas—it is clear how they don't hold much regard for transparency and democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I'm only giving this from a perspective of individuals across my riding. When I go into the Tim Hortons and I sit down and have a coffee with Mrs. Tremblay or Mr. Paquette, this is what they're telling me. They are completely frustrated when they're listening to the legislation that is being brought forward, but also by the lack of thoughtfulness by this government when they're making decisions.

The government's stripping away of the advertising act last year has resulted in taxpayers now paying for partisan commercials. Governments in provinces across the country, like BC, have used third-party advertising restrictions as a way to give candidates and well-resourced third parties a de facto monopoly on free speech during elections. We see this too often. Those well-financed lobby groups have more power to influence decisions, due to the fact that they are able to purchase access to those very decision-makers.

How it is currently written, this bill places serious restrictions on the ability of NGOs, charities and community groups to advocate for their issues during an election. I know that in the north, in my communities, many of these groups have very few resources and already have so much difficulty being heard. Usually it's once or twice a year that many of these municipalities have the opportunity, during ROMA/OGRA conferences, to discuss many of their issues. Many of the smaller organizations in Algoma-Manitoulin simply don't have the funds or access to speak to the government nor have their issues heard during an election.

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Many of the mayors I've spoken to over the weekend shared my concerns. We want to strengthen local democ-

racy, but not at the expense of having many of our communities' interests heard, especially during an election. When we talk about trust and it being a two-way street—other members have raised similar concerns.

On many occasions, the government has made funding announcements in my riding and they have failed to notify me or invite me to these events. Many of these projects are ones that I have been working on for significant amounts of time; however, the government uses these announcements to toot their own horn without acknowledging the hard work of opposition members on these files.

There are certainly some good pieces of this bill. I haven't had an opportunity to read all 65 pages of it yet, but I have to agree with many people who have actually spoken to this bill over the past few days to say that, yes, although the government did announce that they were going out to consult on the municipal act one year ago, they only tabled it a few days ago. Actually, I think it was April 4.

It is a big piece of legislation, and we need to make sure that we give it the focus that it needs. We need to get this right. We need to get it out in the public and really engage our municipalities. In having the discussions with the mayors that I've had across Algoma-Manitoulin, I'm glad that we will be engaging in that discussion. They're looking forward to engaging in the discussion.

My time is running out. How fast it is when you're having fun, Mr. Speaker.

In other areas of the province, it may not be much of an issue. Some of the municipal elections in my communities could have over a dozen people running for office at one time. This may not be such a big issue where other municipal elections would be held, such as here in Toronto.

As I've mentioned before, this is a very large bill. It was just tabled recently, and I am concerned that not enough due diligence was done in the duty to consult.

I want to remind you of the weekend that I had with the Algoma District Municipal Association over the course of the weekend, where some of those mayors were caught off guard with Bill 181.

I look forward to the coming weeks, when I can go home and do some of the consulting, speak with the northern mayors and councils and hear what their concerns are. Issues of concern in northern Ontario communities don't generally reflect those of larger urban areas—so we need to ensure that we do that. I will commit to those communities in Algoma-Manitoulin, to reach out to them and make sure that I get their feedback so their views are reflected here and we can bring a complement to this piece of legislation, to make sure that it doesn't create barriers or disadvantages either in northern communities or other communities across Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I appreciated the comments from the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. I think he is very sin-

cere when he says that he does listen to his local representatives and his local constituents. I commend him for that. I'm sure you're the same, Mr. Speaker. When you go to the local Timmy's in Chatham, they're not talking about municipal election reform; in your riding they're talking about the wonderful interest there is in locally grown products in Chatham-Kent, like the great soybeans you have and the tomatoes you have. That's what they're talking about.

I think we've got to somehow remember that the average person spends five minutes a month thinking about politics. What we need to do here is put this in perspective. There are interested parties, there are municipal leaders, there are associations like AMO and ROMA, and I think we need to bring them here to Queen's Park to hear their deputations on this because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, there are varying opinions on different parts of this bill. Some people like ranked ballots; some people don't even know what ranked ballots are. I don't know what they're saying in Chatham-Kent about ranked ballots; here in Toronto, one council said, "We love ranked ballots," and then as soon as the election took place they changed their mind and said, "We don't like ranked ballots." We don't really know where they stand here in Toronto on this issue.

I'm not sure where the NDP stands on ranked ballots, to tell you the truth. Are you in favour of ranked ballots or are you not? I haven't heard that. I'm not a great fan of ranked ballots; I'll tell you the truth. I think there are some issues with them. I think you should come forward and tell us what you think of ranked ballots, because there are some issues with them.

Anyway, this is a good discussion. This is what the core of this bill is: to get people thinking about the importance of some of these changes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for his presentation on Bill 181. I just wanted to say—and it relates too to what the member from Eglinton-Lawrence just mentioned about the fact that people don't seem to understand what ranked ballots even are. I think that's one of the most important things in this bill and the challenge we face with it. The fact is that municipalities are going to be allowed to implement ranked balloting for their municipal elections in 2018 when there's absolutely nothing in the bill that requires consultation with the public so they understand what ranked balloting is.

I mentioned this in my opening remarks, and the parliamentary assistant in his paper at home suggested, "No, no, the member from Oxford is wrong, because in fact, it's right in there that they must hold a public meeting." I checked the bill, and I would advise the member to read the bill because there is not a mention of a single public meeting about this issue in the bill. I think it's very important that that happens, because when you change the way you elect your council and the administration of your municipality—that in fact, people understand how

that's being done. I don't think that the local municipalities, just because it affects them in a positive way, should be allowed to implement a new balloting system.

When the province decided that we needed to look at a new balloting system, we went to the people. We did a referendum on it. Guess what? Even though the government of the day decided that maybe this was a good thing to put in the referendum, the people of Ontario said, "No, let's stick with the tried-and-true system that we presently have." It may be the worst system in the world—except for all the others. I think that we should at least do that for the people in municipalities so they can have a say in whether we change the way they get elected or not.

And again, in the final wrap-up, I would ask the parliamentary assistant to read the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's a pleasure to rise again today to speak to Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act, 2016, and to add comments to what my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin said.

I just want to say the member from Algoma-Manitoulin is probably one of the most community-engaged MPPs that I know. All you have to do is look on his Facebook to see that he is all over his riding—and it's a large riding. It's not like Windsor West; it's a large riding. There's a great expanse of land, and he manages to get to every single corner of his riding. He does a lot for his communities. He's always talking to people. He's always engaged.

I think that's important to note because he does talk about legislation with his community, with his constituents. The problem is that when his constituents don't know about the legislation to begin with, it's the member from Algoma-Manitoulin who's highlighting it for them. It shows a failure on the government's side to actually get the legislation and the information out to the different ridings, to the constituencies.

A member from the opposite side was kind of alluding to how it was him dropping the ball, by the mayors and councillors not knowing about the legislation. But in fact, it is the government side that has failed to get the information out.

On that, I'd like to talk about what the member from Eglinton-Lawrence said, when he admitted that a lot of people don't know about the legislation. They don't know. The government side doesn't know where people stand, and that's the point. I'd like to thank him for making my point: The government side doesn't know because they're not consulting. They're not giving people enough time to have input. That's a problem—and it's not just on this legislation; it's on everything. All we have to do is look at the budget and how the finance committee hadn't even tabled a report before the budget came out. This is an ongoing problem, and I really think the government side needs to listen to communities and listen to the people on this side of the House.

0940

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I had the great pleasure to speak on this bill. I was in the House for a lot of the debates that took place on this bill. I think we're close to nine and a half hours on this very important bill.

Certainly, for me, having been part of the consultation, let's say, for Ottawa, and throughout the province—we know this is something that municipalities have asked for at various levels. We want to make sure the municipalities are ready for 2018.

I thank all members of this House for sharing their very valuable thoughts with us. Some thoughts need clarification. I think, on the opposite side, there were questions. I know that will be maybe be part of regulations. Having said this, I think it's time that we look at—throughout this process that I've had the pleasure of learning in the past two years is—I think it's time to refer the bill to committee. I would ask the House to consider it. I think when we talk about consultation—we did consult. We did go through the province. But from the valuable insight that we received from the opposition—now I think it's time to look at bringing it to committee, having the real work take place, the next part of our real work take place, and then bring it back to this House.

So I ask the members to consider referring this bill to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member for Algoma-Manitoulin for final comments.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat disappointed with the last speaker, because that is exactly what frustrates constituents from my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin and across this province: when we hear words like, "We've had enough discussions." No, we have not. We have not had an opportunity—each and every one of us here in this House—to bring those views forward and engage with our communities. This has just come to the House.

I want to thank the member from Ottawa-Orléans for having participated in the debate this morning.

To my colleague here from Windsor West: Yes, I do engage quite a bit with my communities, because that's how we can actually get more people engaged in our election process.

As the member from Eglinton-Lawrence said, the perspective from individuals is that we're in a bubble here. We think that everything we're doing here is out there. We fail to recognize that it's not getting out there because people are frustrated with what's happening here and have disengaged with this process. That's what our role is: When we go back to our communities, we go to each and every one of those corners and actually sit down and engage with someone to explain, "This is what's happening and this is why it's happening. This is what they're looking at. These are the good decisions. These are the bad decisions." I believe that's our role as far as what we need to do.

We've always been in favour of proportional representation, my friend from Eglinton-Lawrence; that has always been there. We know that modernizations or changes to the elections act have been asked for. That's what we see coming.

Also, the member from Oxford: You're absolutely right—

Mr. Mike Colle: What's your position on ranked ballots?

Mr. Michael Mantha: On ranked ballots? People don't understand, like you just finished saying. You don't understand it yourself. You stood here and said the people didn't understand it. That's the point.

Hearing the member from Ottawa-Orléans indicating that it's time to send this to committee—it is not time to send this to committee. We need to have further discussion. So let's have that discussion. Don't shut down debate, like you've always done on other pieces of legislation. Allow me, on behalf of Algoma-Manitoulin, to bring those views forward, like every other MPP in this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Interjections.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I really appreciate the welcome, and that members are that excited for me to speak and use my 10 minutes to talk about a very important bill.

Speaker, I'm pleased, and thank you for recognizing me to speak on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

I never had an opportunity to serve at the municipal level. I've been very privileged to be elected as a member of provincial Parliament. As all members in this House will recognize, in our jobs we engage and interact with our municipal leaders on a regular basis, and it's a very important part of our job to work on municipal issues that are important to our local communities, and I'm no exception, Speaker.

I've got four wards within my riding of Ottawa Centre. Within my community, I've got four city councillors who I have a very good working relationship with. We work very closely together, and our staff work very closely together as well, not to mention the mayor, who is actually a former member of this Legislature and who is a close friend and somebody who works extremely hard in representing our city. I have a great opportunity to work along with them.

I want to make a couple of points on this bill, but I will start with a very important premise that is very much an important part of this bill—on two key elements: the issue of ranked ballots, which has been heavily debated in this Legislature, and the issue around campaign financing. On both of those points, it is quite clear in this legislation, the onus to make decisions on behalf of their citizens, the primacy of elected representatives, is set to be on our local councillors. There is a recognition that the municipal governments are duly elected, that they are elected by our citizens in the communities that we represent, and they have a very important role in deciding what kind of municipal system they have in place.

There's a strong element of respect that is very much part of Bill 181. We have this discussion often that we have three orders of government in Canada; we don't

have three levels of government. There is no hierarchy between the three governments, between federal, provincial and municipal. What we have is three orders of government with their equal responsibilities and jurisdictions. A very important aspect in those three orders of government—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Actually, there is something called the Constitution.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I hear references to the Constitution, and I will ask members opposite to actually look at the Constitution. It speak of orders of government; it doesn't speak of levels of government. So I know what I'm speaking about in that regard.

When you look at the orders of government, Speaker, in order for those orders of government to work in a way that they represent the interests of citizens, there has to be respect and there has to be recognition that all three orders of government are duly elected. That principle, in my view, is very much part and parcel of this legislation, both on ranked ballots, for example, and on the issue of campaign financing, around placing a ban on corporate and union donations.

The authority to take those steps is not ordained in this legislation. The only thing this legislation does is give that opportunity to the municipal councils to make that decision on behalf of their citizens, because they are duly elected and they have the capacity to make those decisions. I think that's the right approach, that's the respectful way to take, as opposed to the provincial government telling municipal governments to do X, Y or Z. We're saying, "If you want to introduce ranked balloting in your community, in your municipality, then we're giving you the authority to do so, but the decision is yours." The same thing with putting a ban on corporate and union donations: "You have the capacity, just like we've given to the city of Toronto through their legislation, to make that particular decision." Because then you have got a robust, organic process within the local communities between elected representatives—the mayor and the city councillors—and the community who make those decisions. So I very much respect that fundamental notion in this legislation.

I want to quickly speak to ranked balloting. This is an issue that I have heard regularly about in my community. There's an organization called Ottawa123 who have been very active in this regard. I have received correspondence and have held meetings with constituents who have advocated in support of ranked balloting, and I'm happy to see that it's part of this legislation, giving, again, in the case of my city—the city of Ottawa and the city of Ottawa council—to make the determination whether they want to introduce ranked balloting or not. Of course, they would be required to go through a public consultation process as we all consult with the public and do so.

Speaker, I think that is a very important part of this legislation. I think if municipalities like Ottawa choose ranked balloting, it has a great potential of increasing voter participation, getting more people engaged in local decision-making which has a huge impact on our lives.

There are many other important aspects in this bill and I've been quite heartened to see the kind of passionate debate that has taken place on this issue and others.

I am very surprised to hear that the NDP somehow is against ranked balloting. I think that comes as a big surprise. I would think the NDP would be supportive of ranked ballots. At least that was my impression. I'll leave it up to them to answer to their constituents as to how they feel, because I think people who I've spoken to very much support the notion of ranked balloting as something that is an important step that we're taking to foster democracy in our province.

This is an important debate. There is a lot in this bill, as I've mentioned before. There have been about 10 hours of debate that have taken place in this Legislature. Almost half of the members have spoken on this, and I think it will be very important—

Mr. John Yakubuski: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Thank you, Speaker. The minister has had the opportunity to speak to this bill, and I see where he's going, where others haven't.

Democracy is not a hockey game. It doesn't have a time limit. It's not 60 minutes. The clock doesn't run out on democracy, and never will. But I can see where this minister is going: He's about to bring down the guillotine on this—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. That is not a point of order.

Back to the minister.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Well, Speaker, thank you very much.

As I was saying, clearly there is a lot of passion and clearly there is a lot of interest from all sides that we should be doing more consultations in the committee process and listen to people.

I think it's an appropriate time to move this bill forward so municipalities have ample time to prepare as well for the next municipal election if this bill is passed. Speaker, I sincerely believe it's time that we put this bill to vote for second reading, and hopefully it will be referred to committee where important work takes place. There are many other important bills that we need to also debate in this House. Therefore, I move that the question be now put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Naqvi has moved that the question be now put. I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I believe I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, this vote will be deferred until after question period today.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Orders of the day. I recognize the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: No further business, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please. Since there is no further business this morning, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 0954 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Toby Barrett: We're welcoming chicken farmers today—and wings tonight. I know that Henry Zantingh, the chair of CFO, is here, and Ed Benjamins, Rob Dougans—and Michael Burrows, representing the chicken processors.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: We're delighted, of course, to have Zachary Gan as a page, but we're equally blessed today to have his mother in the gallery, Patricia Gan, and family friend Robert Baker. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I would like to introduce Tim Klompmaker and Murray Booy, who are both on the board of directors with the Chicken Farmers of Ontario. They're here with Team Ontario today for their annual Queen's Park day. They're meeting with members of the Legislature all day to talk about the chicken industry in our province—I met with them this morning—along with a new kosher chicken processing plant that will be opening soon in Ontario.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome Fran and Ian MacFarlane, grandparents of page MacFarlane Benham. Welcome to question period.

Mr. John Vanthof: On behalf of the New Democratic caucus, I would also like to welcome the chicken farmers and processors here today. It's a great industry.

We have some friends from MPAC here as well.

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's chicken day at Queen's Park. I'd like to welcome representatives from Ontario's chicken industry. Welcome to the board members, district committee representatives and staff from the Chicken Farmers of Ontario, including Henry Zantingh, who is the CFO board chair, and Michael Burrows, who is the board chairman for the association of chicken producers for the province of Ontario. I'd like to recognize Tim Klompmaker, who is the director and resides in my riding of Peterborough.

I encourage all of you to come out to the chicken farmers' reception this evening in the Legislature dining room from 5 to 7. It'll be a wingding of a time.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd love to take this opportunity to introduce Adrian Rehorst. He's a great ambassador for the Chicken Farmers of Ontario and a proud farmer from Bruce county.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to introduce, in the members' gallery—we have page Ariel Wendling with us. Her grandmother Denise Lafontaine is here, and her mom, Rosanne Wendling, with her daughters Kyara, Mia and Matteya, who have been pages formerly. Welcome.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's my pleasure to introduce a school from my riding of Scarborough-Guildwood: grade 12 students from Cedarbrae Collegiate. Welcome.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to introduce individuals from the great riding of Oxford: Marty Graf, the chief executive officer of Community Living Tillsonburg, and my constituents Fran and Ian MacFarlane, who are visiting today to watch their grandson, page MacFarlane Benham. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have some friends from the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. here today: Dave Settingington is here from Leamington; the mayor of Stratford, Dan Mathieson, is here; and I believe the mayor of Thunder Bay, Keith Hobbs, is in the building or expected soon.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to introduce a very good friend of mine, Kelly Dunn, who brought her grade 12 class from Cedarbrae Collegiate to the Legislature today.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I've got to introduce as well Henry Zantingh, the chair of the Chicken Farmers, because he's the chair and he's from my riding, in Smithville, and if I don't recognize him he cuts off my chicken supply. Adrian Rehorst is also here from the Chicken Farmers; and Rick Kaptein, Murray Booy, Henk Lise, Murray Opsteen, Mark Hermann, Michael Edmonds and Kathryn Goodish.

My last introduction, to save you some time: I also want to recognize a former mayor of Dryden and the premier of the north, Craig Nuttall. Craig, it's good to see you here as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chicken for everybody.

Further introductions?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I have two introductions, if I may. I'd like to welcome representatives from MPAC who are here today, and Dan Mathieson, board chair of MPAC. They'll be hosting their second annual Queen's Park day today and will be hosting a reception this evening in rooms 228 and 230. Welcome, all members from MPAC.

I would also like to introduce visitors: Carlos Morgadinho, who is the president of the 25th of April Cultural Association—Toronto's 25 de Abril—which is a Carnation Revolution honour from Portugal, as well as board members Manuel Martins and Tomas Ferreira. Their guests from Portugal include Kernel Rui Guimarães and his wife, Adalberto Loureiro. Bem-vindo ao Ontario.

Remarks in Portuguese.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm really excited to welcome, from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex today, Wade Miliken, Rick Collier and Bill Rayburn.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to welcome today, from my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry,

Grand Chief Abram Benedict and Chief Ryan Jacobs. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to welcome a good friend of mine to the House today: the mayor of St. Catharines, Mr. Walter Sendzik.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome Alf Chaiton, who is a constituent and lives in my riding of Ottawa Centre and is a member of the MPAC board, who are visiting here at Queen's Park. Welcome, Alf.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would members please join me in welcoming the family and friends of the late Gary Leadston, MPP for Kitchener–Wilmot during the 36th Parliament, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery: his wife, Anna, and friends Bonnie Devries, Paul and Wendy Pickett, and Dave Cannon. Mr. Leadston is survived—

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You got ahead of me. Mr. Leadston is survived by his four sons and their families, who could not be here with us today: Sean Leadston and his wife, Lee; David Leadston and his wife, Jessica; Steven Evoy and his wife, Kari; and Christopher Evoy and his wife, Tanya; and grandchildren Ethan, Violet, Hudson, Lincoln, Isaac and Parker. Welcome.

Also with us in the gallery is Mr. Steve Gilchrist, MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments. Welcome and thank you very much.

GARY LEADSTON

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I believe you will find we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to Gary Leadston, former member for Kitchener–Wilmot, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister is seeking unanimous consent to pay tribute. Do we agree? Agreed.

I think we have arranged tributes. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm honoured to rise today to offer tribute to former MPP for Kitchener–Wilmot Gary Leadston.

Gary was a lifelong servant of the public. He served as a police officer, as a municipal councillor, as a member of provincial Parliament, and he served with a smile on his face and a door always open to the public. Gary's contributions to his community will be dearly missed.

We are joined here today by some of Gary's friends—his wife, Anna; and his four friends Bonnie Devries, Dave Cannon and Paul and Wendy Pickett. Welcome. I want to say thank you for being with us here today to celebrate Gary's life and public service.

Gary had two children, Sean and David Leadston; two stepchildren, Steve and Chris Evoy; and four grandchildren, Ethan, Hudson, Lincoln and Isaac.

Gary was born in Guelph and moved to Kitchener in 1960. He started his career as a police officer in the old Kitchener city police force. Wearing a uniform was

something that ran in his family. His father was a police officer before him, and two of his brothers were a fire-fighter and a warrant officer in the Canadian Armed Forces, respectively.

When I learned that this tribute to Gary was coming up, I reached out to some people in Kitchener–Waterloo who knew Gary and who worked with him, to get their sense of what he was like. The overall sentiment I heard was that Gary was open, always friendly, social, and a real people person who worked hard to represent the community he represented.

1040

Former member of Parliament for Waterloo Walter McLean told me, "Gary had a strong sense of community. He was a leader who understood the larger issues of safety and security but was not captive by them. He was open to different perspectives, and he was an open listener." Those are valuable skills for anyone in public life to have. And while no one I spoke to told me this, he must have been very punctual because, in 1968, Gary left the police force to work for the Waterloo County Board of Education as a truant officer.

He first ran for office in 1978, winning a seat on Kitchener city council, where he served with distinction as a bridge builder and a booster of the city.

A few years later, Gary added regional council to his list of responsibilities, sitting on both regional and city council until 1994, when he ran for mayor of Kitchener. While he wasn't successful in that bid, he quickly won the nomination for the riding of Kitchener–Wilmot for the PCs, who swept the region's four seats in the 1995 provincial election. Gary sat in this Legislature from 1995 to 1999.

Even though Gary wasn't here at Queen's Park for a long time, he made his name known. His former seatmate in the Legislature and former MPP for Cambridge, Gerry Martiniuk, recalled how Gary's office on the fourth floor became the "party floor," as other MPPs came by to hang out and eat his food. Apparently, he had a slow cooker in there. I would have stopped by as well.

While he was here at Queen's Park, Gary advocated for issues that mattered in his riding, always with an eye towards public safety. The former basket-weave interchange on Highway 7/8 in Kitchener was a traffic hazard that Gary recognized needed to be improved. In 1996, there were 116 accidents close to this interchange. He invited the then Minister of Transportation, Al Palladini, to come visit the site and witness the havoc first-hand. To his credit, he got the minister to visit the riding, and in 1998 the changes were announced.

On behalf of New Democrats, I want to thank Anna and Gary's family and friends for sharing Gary with us and his community. Our community is stronger for his service. He left us too soon, but his life was well lived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tributes?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: It is a great honour, as the member for Kitchener Centre, to pay tribute today to Gary Leadston, who served in this Legislature from 1995 to 1999. Gary's family and friends are here today as we pay

tribute to his service to the province of Ontario. They know him as a selfless public servant who served his community as a volunteer on many organizations and as an elected representative locally and in the province.

But in preparing this tribute, Mr. Speaker, I did my homework to get the inside story on Gary Leadston, the things you won't find in a newspaper obituary or on Wikipedia. This background, I believe, gives fuller insight into the true person, and I want to share that with you, to offer a deeper appreciation of former MPP Gary Leadston.

Gary was born in 1941 in Guelph, Ontario. He was educated at the Ontario Police College and at Wilfrid Laurier University. He worked as a beat cop in Kitchener. This experience taught him a great deal about dealing with people.

As a civic-minded champion of the community, Gary was a founding member of the Big Brothers Association of K-W and served as its president in 1975.

Gary decided to enter local politics, winning a seat on Kitchener city council, and served from 1978 to 1994. He also sat as a member of our regional government from 1981 to 1994. In 1987, he was named chair of the Waterloo Regional Police Commission.

A councillor who served with him told me that one of his greatest feats was that he voted in favour of the new Kitchener city hall. In the early 1990s, construction of this modern, costly new building was a hotly debated issue in my community. There were those who thought it was a waste of time and a waste of taxpayers' dollars. But in a final intense debate, Gary sided with those who saw the broader good in building what is now the focal point of downtown Kitchener. Mr. Speaker, he had the courage of his convictions in the face of opposition because he knew it was the right thing to do.

Those who served with him on Kitchener city council told me that you couldn't find a more fun-loving, likeable guy. In fact, at city council meetings, Gary was the one who always had a joke to tell that made the long hours during those council meetings bearable. He was very good at making people laugh.

At community events where he'd be asked to speak publicly, it was said that Gary was on par with any professional comedian. One colleague told me he laughed so hard one night at Gary's string of hilarious jokes that his face actually ached for hours after the event. This was a politician who knew how to please a crowd.

After serving locally, Gary decided to take a run at provincial politics in the riding of Kitchener-Wilmot. One of his close colleagues told me that he actually thought Gary was quite liberal in his politics, so why run for the Conservative Party? Well, they were the ones who came knocking, and, in 1995, Gary Leadston was swept to power with the Conservative wave led by Mike Harris.

During the four years that he served at Queen's Park, Gary was committed to representing the people of his riding. Here at the Legislature, he was committed to supporting and even entertaining his colleagues. As you heard, on his fourth-floor office, he had a slow cooker. It was known for feeding anyone who came by.

This is when I came to know Gary Leadston. Anchoring and producing a weekly news and current affairs program for CKCO-TV in Kitchener, I remember the times that I interviewed our local MPP on various issues. He was always forthcoming and friendly.

But when the Harris government decided to reduce the number of provincial ridings from 130 to 103, Gary found himself pitted in a nomination battle for the riding of Kitchener Centre, which, unfortunately, he lost. He and his family later moved to Rideau Ferry, and he went on to serve for many years on the Ontario Parole Board.

Gary Leadston died at home on December 2, 2013, of pancreatic cancer at the age of 72, but his legacy in my community will long be remembered. He fought for and won the construction of Lackner Boulevard, a new indoor pool at Stanley Park, and the erection of the old clock tower at Victoria Park, the new city hall and regional headquarters.

To his family: Anna, you have a great deal of which to be proud. Gary was a husband, father and grandfather who made his mark as a community leader. He cared, he was committed and he made us laugh. He was a people person who made a difference.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tributes?

Mr. Michael Harris: Today, I'm proud to stand here and speak of the life and legacy of a community leader in my region: a long-time local municipal councillor and a former PC MPP from Kitchener-Wilmot, Gary Leadston.

I'm very honoured to share this House today with MPP Leadston's friends who are joining us in the Speaker's gallery: Bonnie Devries, Dave Cannon, and Paul and Wendy Pickett. Thank you for being here.

Unfortunately, the long commute has meant that many of his family could not make it: his sons, Sean and David, his two stepsons and his four grandchildren. To his family who are unable to be here with us today, know that this Legislature and our community have you in our thoughts.

To Gary's wife, Anna, who is with us in the Speaker's gallery: Thank you for being here today to help share Gary's stories.

Although I've never had the pleasure, unfortunately, of knowing Gary personally, I've had the opportunity to hear stories recounted to me by those who knew him best. Speaker, when you ask anyone about Gary, their immediate response is the same: Gary was a true people person who cared deeply about his community and, by all accounts, was a great guy.

City councillor Geoff Lorentz, who remembers Gary as a mentor when Lorentz first came to city hall, humbly said, "He was always proud of his job and proud of the people he represented.... He was a great guy. He knew everybody in his ward, and everybody knew him."

It's with this love of his community that, in 1995, Gary easily secured his place here in the Ontario Legislature. The veteran municipal politician won his campaign by more than 7,000 votes against the runner-up. Gary, 53 at the time, walked into his victory party to thank his supporters, simply stating, "I can't say enough, from the bot-

tom of my heart, how much I love each and every one of you. And I love winning.”

My caucus colleagues, both former and present, remember Gary as a social, fun-loving guy who had an affinity for storytelling and could get a room full of people laughing until they cried. Everyone loved being around him.

1050

Former MPP Marcel Beaubien said, “Just like with everyone in life, there were good times and bad—we just had a lot of good times.” He said this as he recounted a story that is famous in my neck of the woods in this Ontario Legislature: the fourth floor, which Gary referred to as the “fun floor,” and where many members’ offices still reside today, in fact.

This story takes place after Gary’s colleagues had returned from a successful moose hunting trip. Gary loved cooking, but more importantly, like any of the current PC members, Gary loved to eat. In order to bring everyone together, Gary hosted a moose meat cookout right above us, here in the House, on the fourth floor. For those of you who have been on the fourth floor, you know this Legislature is simply not conducive to a wild game cookout, but that didn’t stop Gary. The smell of meat filled the halls and many began to make their way toward the delicious smell. There must have been at least 40 people in attendance, everyone from MPPs to cleaning staff. As the cookout went on, Gary entertained everyone with his charismatic sense of humour. No one knew how he could remember so many jokes, but that’s what he loved doing, and he did it very well.

As history shows, Gary truly was the life of the party. Gary loved life. He loved his job and he loved to spend time with his colleagues at the end of a busy day here at Queen’s Park. A large group of PC MPPs would gather almost daily, after the House wound up, in Morley Kells’s office on—you guessed it—that same fourth floor.

Gary would always be discussing the issues of the day with his colleagues. No matter what the issues were, they were problems worth solving, and Gary always worked hard toward a solution. His roots never digressed from the constituency-based politician that he was when he walked through these doors.

Just like Gary said when he first arrived, “I enter the legislative building with a tremendous sense of pride and humility.” His colleagues knew, and know, this is exactly how he served during his time here at the assembly. Gary was the kind of MPP this place absolutely needs: reliable, professional, thoughtful, caring, courageous and, above all, dedicated to the needs of his riding and to the province of Ontario.

Through sickness and health, Gary’s sense of humour and love of life was as strong as ever. Former colleague Gerry Martiniuk visited Gary in the hospital bearing, of course, a St. Jacobs summer sausage. He remembers that Gary kept him in stitches for the hour they were there, in circumstances which would break most people.

Gary unfortunately passed at the age of 72 after a hard-fought battle with pancreatic cancer, in his home of

Rideau Ferry, Ontario, where he lived with Anna. It is with great sadness that he has left us.

On behalf of the Ontario Legislature, I want to thank MPP Gary Leadston for his contributions he has made to this province and to the community and the region of Waterloo. We will all fondly remember the proud legacy that he leaves behind.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to thank all the members for their very thoughtful and heartfelt tributes to Gary.

To the family and friends, as is the tradition of our House, we will make sure that you receive a DVD and a copy of Hansard, of these tributes for your keepsake. Finally, we thank you for the gift of Gary.

EARTHQUAKES IN ECUADOR AND JAPAN

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence before question period as a sign of this House’s condolences to the people of Ecuador and Japan, and those who have lost loved ones in the recent earthquakes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent for a moment of silence for the House to pay tribute to those who lost their lives in the recent earthquakes. Do we agree? Agreed.

Could I ask everyone in the House to please rise for a moment of silence?

The House observed a moment’s silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Pray be seated.

It’s now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Ross MacLean from Barrie wrote to me to share his family’s story. His daughter recently turned five and waited three and a half years for IBI treatment. She has now been receiving treatment for just three weeks. The family has already seen a marked improvement.

Mr. MacLean knows autism doesn’t end at five. His son actually benefitted from IBI until the age of 12. Clearly, autism doesn’t end at five, and neither should IBI treatment.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain why her government thinks it’s okay to kick Mr. MacLean’s daughter out of treatment after just three weeks?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to answer the question and I will do that, but first I want to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on completing the Boston

Marathon. It's no mean feat to complete a marathon, so congratulations.

Mr. Speaker, of course what we want is for that child, and every child in Ontario who has autism, to get the service that they need. So we want that child—I'm sorry, I've lost her name in the moment—to get the intensive treatment that she needs, which is why the transition into the new program will include service in those intensive services.

We understand that the \$8,000 that will be for the initial transition is not enough; we understand that. That's why we're setting up the program that will allow her to continue with intensive services.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: I also received an email from Tia Riopel from Uxbridge. She is the mom of Jolie-Anne Jones. I want to read to you the impact IBI had for Jolie-Anne. To quote the family, IBI “gave her a voice, words, the ability to make eye contact and make friends.”

“IBI opened her eyes to her family....”

“After six months of IBI, she acknowledged the presence of her grandfather for the first time and gave him a hug.”

That's how the family describes it. Listening to that, how can you take away IBI treatment from Jolie-Anne's family?

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier think as a parent and a grandparent and explain how she can take IBI treatment away from all these children and families? We don't need political talking points. Will the Premier do the right thing and not take these kids off the wait-list?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The opposition party wants to frame this as though we're taking something away from people. What we're doing is we are providing services that are tailored to the children, and those will be intensive.

I need us to hear from some of the people who have been advocating for these changes, people who are experts in the field and are working with the very children that the member is talking about.

Peter Szatmari is the chief of the child and youth mental health collaborative between CAMH, SickKids and U of T. Peter Szatmari has been working—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: He has been working in this field for decades. What he says is that it is so important to personalize intervention services for children with ASD. This funding opportunity is a significant step in that direction. Early intervention for all, but different interventions at different times, is an essential step in the right direction. That is what we are doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: No matter how you slice it, thousands and thousands of kids have been taken off the wait-list for help—not through being provided IBI, but simply abandoned. These children can't be abandoned.

I'm going to tell you another story, this one from the Saunders family. On March 28, their daughter Sloane came off the IBI waiting list after two long years of waiting. One week later, they were told Sloane was now too old to receive treatment, and her IBI would end in September. As the Saunders family said, this is “life-changing therapy.”

Autism does not end at five. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier do the right thing? Hearing the overwhelming response from families in Ontario, from those with a loved one with autism, will she do the right thing and stop these cuts to the IBI therapy? Will the Premier do the right thing: yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

1100

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The 333 million new dollars that are going in to create the program and to provide a transition—we know that autism doesn't end at five. We also know that sitting on a waiting list and not getting any service is wrong. I am actually quite shocked that the opposition parties—both of them—would be advocating for keeping children on a waiting list and not getting them service. So—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Labour is not helping.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want Sloane to have the service that she needs—to get that intensive service. As importantly, I want all of the children who are on that waiting list who are not getting service to get the intensive service that they need in the same way that Sloane is getting that service. That's the change that we're making.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Since I can't get anything but political spin on the autism cuts, let's talk about something else. I came across a—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order.

Question, please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: To the Premier: I came across a photo of a Hydro One bill the other day. It was dated April 13, 2016. It read: “On-peak: zero kilowatts per hour used. Mid-peak: zero kilowatts per hour used. Off-peak: zero kilowatts per hour used. Total cost of electricity: \$113.”

Why is it acceptable for Hydro One to charge this family \$113 for not using any electricity?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: As recognized, Hydro One needed to be improved. We've made the changes necessary to provide greater consumer experience; that has been done. We've modernized the electricity system. That needed to be improved, and we've done so.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to use that line as well.

Minister.

Hon. Charles Sousa: We continue to advance on those improvements so that consumers have the ability to get the services they need—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me.

If you think that this is some kind of game, that as soon as I sit down you start up again, you're sadly mistaken. If that happens again, I'll nail you.

Carry on.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Throughout this process that's necessary to be competitive—I appreciate the member's question. That's one of the very reasons why Hydro One has made the changes they've made.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: I didn't hear something remotely to be an answer in that response, so I'll ask the Premier again.

As CityNews puts it:

"The math doesn't seem to add up.

"Despite a mild winter which saw Ontarians conserve electricity, hydro rates are set to increase next month because we saved too much energy.

"It defies logic but that's the reason given" by the government: that you use less and you get charged more—only in Ontario. The family got charged \$113, and now has to pay more. It's unbelievable.

Does the Premier find it acceptable to charge hydro customers more to use less? Simple question: yes or no?

Hon. Charles Sousa: When it comes to pricing, the member has just reinforced the necessity for us to make these enhancements and these improvements to Hydro One, which is exactly what we've done.

In 2013, in our long-term energy plan, the average projected payment was about \$167 on a monthly bill. What the opposition fails to acknowledge is that prices are, in fact, coming down well below those very projections. What we must do is continue to provide the services necessary to improve—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, come to order. The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, come to order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Even when we take into account the OEB's most recent rate decision, the average household bill will be under \$150 per month. That's about \$200 per year less than the projections that were given

publicly more than two years ago. We have made improvements.

I recognize the member's question toward a specific individual, and those are all the reasons we put forward an ombudsman, which is necessary to address her issue directly. That is why, again, we've made those appropriate changes at Hydro One.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Once again back to the Premier: It's unbelievable that the Minister of Finance can actually say in this House that hydro rates are going down. No one in Ontario believes that, not even for a second.

Let's examine the problem: Brady Yauch, the executive director of the Consumer Policy Institute, explained the rise in hydro rates by saying this: "This province has overbuilt the electricity sector significantly and it has to pass on those costs." In fact, Ontario is now procuring an additional 900 more megawatts of costly energy, much of that from costly wind projects. It's not just that it's overbuilt; it's that they continue to overbuild. The question is, why? Maybe we could ask the wind companies that attended the \$6,000-a-plate dinner with the Premier and energy minister: "Why?" Is this about rewarding your friends or is this about affordable hydro rates?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader, come to order.

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We've been very clear in our long-term strategy, in our budgets and in our regard to providing a prudent plan on Ontario's energy, and we've shared those investments, substantive investments, to introduce new, clean power plants and eliminate coal completely from our system. I'd also highlight that in the last two elections, the opposition have made no plans and have not identified any publication of what those electricity costs would be going forward—they keep those details secret.

Mr. Speaker, eliminating dirty coal generation from Ontario, from our electricity system, now enables us to be 90% emissions-free. There were 53 smog days in Ontario in 2005; in 2014, the smog days were zero—none—because of the efforts and investments that we've made to improve emissions and a cleaner environment, something the opposition does not support. That's unfortunate for future generations. We—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Earlier today, I stood with the leader of the official opposition and the leader of the Green Party of Ontario, and, together, we called on the Premier to form an independent panel that will recommend changes to how

election campaigns are funded so that we can bring about real change in a way that is transparent, in a way that is open and in a way that is trustworthy.

Will this Premier agree to appointing a non-partisan panel to bring fairness to Ontario's election rules?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm committed to changing political donation rules in Ontario. We have put forward a proposal in terms of bringing in draft legislation in the spring. We have said that there is already a broad consensus on the direction that we need to go. I had a meeting with the leaders of the opposition parties to get their input on some of the questions, because there are questions. Even though there is a consensus on, for example, banning union and corporate donations, there are questions around a public subsidy, for example. I have no idea where the leaders of the opposition parties stand on the details around that. I look forward to hearing from them.

It's interesting, because my understanding from the press conference this morning is that there was a desire to have input into the draft legislation. I have asked for that input from the opposition leaders, and I will come back to that in my supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, apparently the Premier didn't listen at that meeting that she had with the leaders of the opposition parties. We told her, quite clearly, that she should not be changing Ontario's election laws unilaterally, because that puts us on a very slippery slope.

1110

Today I, along with the leaders of the official opposition and the Green Party of Ontario, set our partisan interests aside, and together we are asking the Premier to do the right thing and put her partisan interests aside. It's not just political parties. Democracy Watch has said, "The unilateral decision by the Liberals on changes that will be made goes against their own commitment to consult with Ontarians."

Will the Premier listen to Democracy Watch and the leaders of three of Ontario's four major parties, and agree to meaningful public consultation through an independent panel before changing Ontario's election laws?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's quite remarkable that the leader of the third party is basically saying that there is no democratic process that we follow in this Legislature. It's quite remarkable. What we have said—

Mr. Randy Hillier: You don't follow it very well.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —is that we bring forward draft legislation and, in an unusual process, send the legislation out for consultation after first reading and then allow for that consultation to take place between now and the fall; then, allow the legislation and send the legislation out for consultation again after second reading.

Mr. Randy Hillier: This morning, you had a closure motion on Bill 181.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That would mean the opposition parties can call whatever witnesses they want to speak to the committee.

What's also interesting is that, right now, the House leaders are having a conversation about how the opposition parties might give input into the legislation before it's drafted. That seems to run counter to what the leader of the third party said this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What is remarkable is that this Premier is clinging to her power instead of doing the right thing by the people of Ontario. That's what's remarkable, Speaker, and it is very unseemly in a democratic province.

Today's press conference wasn't about me, nor was it about the leader of the official opposition, nor was it about the leader of the Green Party—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Leader.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It is actually about Ontarians, and perhaps this Premier needs to think about them when she's thinking about this issue. We came together in the spirit of co-operation and consensus to call on this Premier to do the right thing.

For nearly 30 years, election laws were updated with consensus and non-partisan input. We are calling on this Premier to build on that the tradition, instead of putting Ontario on a slippery slope where any political party with a majority can change election laws whenever they want.

Will this Premier agree to establishing a non-partisan panel that will make recommendations on how to ensure election laws are fair for all Ontarians?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not willing to delay the process. I'm not willing to slow it down. I'm not willing to buy into the stalling tactics of the opposition parties.

As I said, right now, my understanding is that the government House leader is having a conversation with the other House leaders about how the opposition parties might have input into the legislation, if they choose, before the legislation is drafted, but that obviously starts with the opposition parties actually coming forward with some substantive opinions about some of the issues that have to be grappled with in order to write the legislation. Then that legislation can go out and the opposition parties can call whomever they choose to come and speak to the legislation across the province.

That's the definition of the democratic process as it works in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, and as it works in the province of Ontario. I look forward to their participation in that.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question's also for the Premier. The leaders of three of Ontario's major political parties joined to say that our elections should be

fair and Ontarians themselves should be involved at every step of the way if changes are going to be made. None of us is asking to be in charge, but we are saying that the Liberal Party shouldn't be in charge of making the rules either. The rules that govern our democracy should be built fairly and they should be built to last, not made according to the whims of any one political party.

Will this Premier agree to create a panel, chaired by a neutral party, outside of this Legislature, with members from political parties, Ontarians and civil society, like business, labour and academia?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am quite confident that business and labour and academia—folks from each one of those sectors and beyond—will come to speak to the committee, to speak to the legislation after first reading. The whole point—

Mr. Randy Hillier: And be ignored, all of them.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I hear the heckling on the other side. The point, just to inform the member opposite—

Mr. Randy Hillier: You ignore them all.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark, second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The point of sending the legislation out after first reading would be to hear that input, in order to be able to amend the legislation in ways that would be appropriate, given the remarks that will be heard at committee. That's the whole point of sending it out after first reading. So I look forward to that debate, as the legislation comes forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, those of us on this side of the House are confident that regardless of what anybody says in a committee process that's run by the Liberals, the Liberals will do whatever the heck they want at the end of the day. We see it over and over and over again.

Ontarians deserve to know—no matter who they are, how deep their pockets are or where they come from—that their voice will actually be heard. That's why we need to make election laws with a process that is fair and that is open. Three of Ontario's major political parties have set partisanship aside and agreed on the ground rules for a process that is fair, that is open, that is transparent and, most importantly, that is a process that Ontarians can have faith in.

Will this Premier do the right thing and agree to that process?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the leader of the third party is preoccupied with the process, but there are some things we actually don't need to consult on, and I'd be interested to know what they think about that.

For example, we don't need to consult on whether or not we should move to a ban on union donations. We don't believe we need to consult on a ban on corporate donations. We don't think we need to consult on issues around reforming third-party advertising and putting maximum spending limits on third-party advertising. We

don't think we need to consult on the issue of whether we should reduce the maximum donations.

We have put forward our proposal. We really do hope—we really sincerely hope—that the opposition parties will participate in the legislation discussion. The Premier has welcomed your input. You are just focused on the process; we're focused on action.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier of this province has an extremely important decision to make: She can agree with the growing consensus of political parties and civil society that changes to our election laws should be made based on fairness, consensus and with the approval of Ontarians, and establish a non-partisan advisory panel on political finance reform and election participation. Or she can go it alone, making all the decisions in the back-rooms of the Premier's office and ramming things through a Liberal-dominated committee, giving Ontarians more reason to be cynical about politics and this Liberal government.

Speaker, the question is very simple: Which is it going to be?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Can we have one idea from you? Just a little one?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, come to order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: No ideas?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, in case you didn't hear me, come to order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, he was late, so he probably didn't get the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It is surprising and interesting that the leader of the third party is opposed to changes that the NDP government has made in Alberta. In Alberta, the NDP introduced an Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. The Premier introduced legislation, and then it was sent to committee for public consultations.

In fact, as you heard from the Premier, we're adding an extra round of public consultations after first reading, which is a very unusual step—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask all members to come to order, because it's not one side.

Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Here in Ontario, we're consulting before we introduce the legislation. We believe it's important to get this right. But we also believe it's important that we get this done. We are moving forward because we think that this kind of reform needs to be made, and it needs to be made now.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Every week, we're hearing

about the crisis in health care, the rationing of our system that leaves many without health care services. Now we're hearing that people will die due to the government's mismanagement of the health care system.

Allo stem cell transplant is the only treatment for patients with acute leukemia, MDS or other life-threatening diseases. The Princess Margaret hospital is rejecting new patients requiring stem cell transplants because they've run out of money. The option now given to patients is to seek treatment in United States.

Ontarians expect our health care system to be better than that. Speaker, will the minister ensure that emergency funding is available so that Ontarians can receive the life-saving treatment they require in Ontario?

1120

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question.

Mr. Speaker, our government has increased funding for stem cell transplants in this province by over 600% in the last four years. We've done this to meet increasing demands; I know the member opposite knows this as well.

This is a good thing. Recent advances, technological advances, and pharmaceutical advances in care have actually made stem cell transplants—particularly the allogeneic type; which is a transplant from a different donor into the individual—a safer and more effective option for more patients than ever before. We're seeing the result of that technological advance in the increased opportunity for Ontarians to benefit from that procedure.

The increase in eligible patients: It is true and accurate that the wait times for stem cell transplants have grown in this province. That's why our government is working to make sure that we meet that growing demand.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Minister, you're not meeting the growing demand. In fact, I find it insulting to the people of Ontario that the Ministry of Health has money to run radio ads promoting how great they are and not enough money for people needing cancer treatment.

Mr. Speaker, back to the minister: How many funding emergencies must Ontarians face before this government acts? Lack of funding for life-saving treatment is unacceptable.

For a treatment where time is of the essence, current patients at Princess Margaret must wait, on average, 200 days, which increases the chance of treatment failure. For new patients needing treatment, there is no viable option for transplants in the province. They must travel to another country.

Speaker, we have seen the rationing of care for mental health and dementia patients, and the rationing of care through postponement or complete cancellation of knee and hip surgeries across the province. But to ration life-saving treatment? Has the government's mismanagement of health care reached a new low?

Speaker, will the minister stop the rationing and act now to ensure life-saving stem transplant is accessible—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, it's somewhat hypocritical, because that member—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister will withdraw.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It's somewhat surprising, then, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite would take this particular approach. In fact, the entire opposition have voted against our budget that actually allocated nearly 30 million new dollars for stem cell transplants in this province. That money is flowing.

We're aware of the operational concerns. There are six hospitals across this province that will benefit from that increased funding, but we're also aware that we need to deal with these wait times immediately. That's why Cancer Care Ontario is working with the patients and the hospitals currently on the wait-list to ensure that that out-of-country option is available for them if they choose it.

But it's that \$30-million investment that they voted against that will really make the difference, Mr. Speaker.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. In the past, the Premier has created expert panels to study everything from reports by other expert panels to what should be sold in grocery stores. But the Premier is dragging her feet on creating an independent panel that will make sure Ontarians can trust that new election rules that are developed are actually fair and put democratic values first. This is very different from other bills; this is a democratic bill that will address the way our elections are governed.

Will the Premier join with Democracy Watch, the NDP, the Greens and the PCs, and agree to establish a transparent, fast-moving, non-partisan panel willing to meet any deadline set to make sure that the new election rules are fair in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I will say to the member opposite: What's more democratic than taking a bill to the democratic institution that is represented by people who have—elected those representatives? Speaker, there is nothing more democratic than this House.

I think the rhetoric coming from the NDP is very dangerous when they start arguing that somehow this place and the members who are elected in this House are not democratic and do not have the expertise, do not have the credentials and do not have the validity to work on issues such as reforming our campaign finance rules.

I ask the NDP to come forward with their substantive ideas so that we can work together, listen to experts within the legislative process and pass this very important piece of legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: What's dangerous is when one party uses its majority to rewrite election rules in the province. That's what is dangerous.

In 2004, the Supreme Court of Canada said: "Electoral fairness is key. Where Canadians perceive election rules to be unfair, voter apathy follows shortly thereafter." We want to ensure that people have trust in the process to ensure that the results are also very fair.

The Premier can show leadership today. She can agree to ensure that our election rules are made in an impartial manner through an independent panel that's non-partisan and, most importantly, is based on consensus decision-making. In an open process, Ontarians can trust the results.

The question is simple: Will the Premier do the right thing? Will she ensure that an independent panel is struck that abides by the principles of consensus-based decisions, or will she go it alone and keep the process entirely under the control of the Liberal majority?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Basically, what the NDP process does is it prolongs this process and undermines bringing in new campaign financing rules in preparation for the next election. This side of the House—the government and the Premier—is not interested in prolonging this matter. We want to bring in the legislation this spring and, as a result, what we want to do is have very robust consultation both after the first reading and after the second reading in the Legislature.

I understand that the member opposite may be a little confused because we haven't used that process where we can take a bill after first reading—but we have an amazing opportunity, through our rules, to take a bill right after first reading. We want to have those consultations throughout the summer, listen to the Chief Electoral Officer, listen to the leader of the Green Party and experts and Ontarians, and get their views so we can work together collaboratively and pass a piece of legislation that will foster democracy in Ontario.

ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. We were all deeply saddened to hear about the tragic news at Attawapiskat last week. It's important to note that our government took urgent steps to respond to their call for help. We've learned that Ontario is providing \$2 million in immediate support and is addressing long-term assistance to the community at this time of need. It is the right thing to do. But Attawapiskat is just one of many communities in Ontario facing these sorts of challenges.

Could the minister please tell us how the government is working with indigenous communities to address the everyday challenges that they face?

Hon. David Zimmer: The health and well-being of all First Nations people is a priority for this government, especially those in communities like Attawapiskat and other remote First Nations.

I want to start by commending my colleagues the Minister of Health and the Minister of Children and Youth for their very swift response to the crisis in Attawapiskat.

Our government recognizes that more work needs to be done to improve the health status and overall well-being of people living in remote communities. That's why our 2016 budget included greater investments in indigenous health services, access to education and northern infrastructure.

We also now have a federal partner that is willing to work with First Nations and provincial governments to maximize investments and to complement our work in addressing these issues. That was not the case with the previous federal government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'd like to thank the minister and his staff for all of their hard work on this very important issue.

The challenges these communities face are systemic: inadequate housing, risk of flooding, limited access to clean drinking water, and insufficient educational supports. These are issues affecting indigenous communities right across Ontario.

While we are now fortunate to have a federal government that is committed to working with our indigenous partners, Ontario does have a role to play. It's very encouraging to see that in the 2016 budget we have included a number of very significant investments for indigenous people, such as funding our long-term strategy to combat violence against indigenous women.

Speaker, could the minister please tell us what our government is doing to help remote communities address the issues that they face?

1130

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, in the 2016 budget we set out a number of commitments that benefit remote communities. Some of them are:

—\$13 million to support indigenous communities' fight to adapt to climate change and to develop micro-grids and energy storage options;

—\$100 million over three years for our long-term strategy to end violence against indigenous women and girls. This includes funding for additional front-line service workers to provide access to family services and \$80 million for a new family well-being program to help families in crisis and support communities;

—other investments in indigenous health, such as additional funding for the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Strategy to address the very high costs of program delivery in remote communities, \$1.3 million annually for Ontario's Aboriginal Health Access Centres and \$2 million for engagement on public mental health.

This government is very serious about addressing these issues, Speaker.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the Premier. Laurentian University has made the decision to close its

Barrie campus, in large measure because it was turned down by the government in its bid to expand to an independent campus, and in part because it was being forced by the government to restrict where and how it educated its student body. Ultimately, it all comes back to funding. Without transitional dollars, hundreds of students will be displaced from the Barrie campus of Laurentian before they finish their degrees.

Speaker, will the Premier do the right thing? Will she and her government provide transitional funding for these students to remain in Barrie to finish their degrees?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think it's important to note on this issue that our government has been committed to trying to figure out how to make sure that students who are in Simcoe county do have good access to post-secondary education.

In fact, we worked extensively with Georgian College, with Laurentian and with Lakehead, who all have a presence in Barrie, to figure out how we can expand that access to high-quality, degree-level education in Barrie and Orillia and other communities in Simcoe county. In fact, we went so far as to have John Gerretsen work with them all last summer.

However, as the member has noted, Laurentian has decided to close its campus in Barrie, and they are working with—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Again to the Premier: Students thought they were entering a contractual relationship when they signed into their university programs in Barrie. One of the terms was rightly assumed to be, "The school will be here while I'm finishing my degree." Now it won't be for so many of them. Speaker, why can't students at Laurentian in Barrie finish their degrees the way they started: in Barrie?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Speaker, I want to assure you that we have been working with Laurentian and working with students who, understandably, want to complete their degrees. Of the 220 students that have been affected, 105 have already chosen to continue their degree on the Sudbury campus of Laurentian. I understand that half of them have actually already started classes recently or will very soon.

But the students will have a range of options: As I've noted, some of them will be completing their degrees at the Sudbury campus; some of the students will be able to complete a three-year bachelor of arts degree in Barrie, at the Georgian-Lakehead campus; and some of them are opting to transfer to another university with a letter of permission from the faculty to take courses at another university.

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. In 2008, the Equal Pay Coalition released detailed recommendations on how to eliminate the gender wage gap by

2025. Eight years later, the gap remains stuck at around 30%, and Ontarians have yet to see specific, concrete actions to close the gap from the Premier or her government.

How can Ontarians have confidence in the Premier's commitment to eliminate the gender wage gap when her 2016 budget did not include any of the key strategies recognized as essential to achieve equal pay, such as investments in child care, and the Liberal government has consistently failed to enforce its own pay equity and employment standards laws?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister responsible for women's issues.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank my critic for this very important question and for asking it today, on Equal Pay Day.

As the critic knows, it's in my mandate letter as well as the Minister of Labour's mandate letter to develop a wage gap strategy to ensure that we close that gap.

We want women to achieve their full economic potential. We want fairness. We want equitable treatment in workforces. Closing that gap is important to families as well, not just to women themselves.

We appointed a steering committee last year to lead the development of that wage gap strategy, and the minister and I met with the panel just this morning. A number of consultations were held throughout the province, and a summary of what was heard is made public on the Ministry of Labour's website.

We know there's more to do, Speaker. The Minister of Labour and I are deeply committed to addressing this issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Women in Ontario have waited too long for the Premier to make the changes that are necessary to close the gap. The Premier has ignored the actions that can be taken right now, like child care funding and enforcing labour laws—actions that do not require the report of the gender wage gap steering committee. And despite the gender lens mandate that was given to the minister responsible for women's issues, it is clear that no effort was made to apply a gender and equity lens to the 2016 budget.

Once the final report of the gender wage gap steering committee is received in May, will the Premier make the report public and will she move immediately to implement the recommendations? Or will Ontarians have to wait another eight years or longer to see any concrete action?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member for the question.

I want to thank the steering committee for the tremendous work they've done on behalf of this House, travelling throughout the province of Ontario, talking to people, getting advice from those people, getting ideas as to how we can close the gender wage gap. These are our mothers, our granddaughters, our sisters, our aunts. There's nobody in this House who agrees that a gender wage gap should still exist in 2016.

These people are bringing forward their ideas. There's a process that's been put in place. I want to thank everybody that's taken part in this process to date: 530 people came forward; almost 1,500 people sent in their ideas.

A report was received today; the recommendations will follow very shortly; the implementation phase comes after that. I look forward to the support of all members of the House in the implementation phase.

PAY EQUITY

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Today is Equal Pay Day, a day to raise awareness of the earnings gap between men and women in Ontario. Members of this House may not know, but the day is calculated each year to mark the extra time it takes a woman to earn as much as a man.

Men in Ontario earned an average of \$50,000 while it took women until April 20 the following year to earn the same amount.

Based on the most recent Statistics Canada data, Ontario's gender wage gap ranges from 14% to 32%. The Royal Bank of Canada estimated that personal incomes would be \$168 billion higher each year if women in Canada had the same labour market opportunities as men.

More must be done in the province of Ontario to level the playing field. Speaker, through you to the minister: How is Ontario helping to end the gender wage gap?

1140

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to thank the honourable member for that important question following up on the other one.

Many people have talked about this issue over the years. This government is doing something about it. What we've done is, we've got people from around this province who have an expertise in this issue. They've gone around this province. They've spoken to people. They've consulted with experts in the field. They're bringing us back their best advice.

It's unacceptable that women still don't get paid as well, or have the same opportunities, as men in our society. We, as a group, need to change that by demolishing the barriers that have held us back from progress in the past.

Others have talked about it in the past. This is a government that's acting on it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I would like to thank the minister for his answer.

I understand that the gender wage gap is a complex issue caused by many factors. We know that all women across the economic spectrum are affected by the wage gap, but the gap is more pronounced for women who are minorities, aboriginal, newcomers or living with disabilities. I also know that other factors intersect with gender to compound the wage gap. This is something I heard that the steering committee no doubt addresses, but more must be done.

Can the minister please share steps the government has taken to ensure equality in the workplace for women?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The minister responsible for women's issues.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I agree with the member and I agree with the opposition that there's much more work to do. But let's not lose sight of what we have done and what we're continuing to do, including significant investments in child care, continuing to implement full-day kindergarten, and helping low-income women learn new skills, change careers and secure better-paying jobs through the Women in Skilled Trades and Information Technology Training program. The Women's Directorate funds programs for women who have experienced abuse, or who are at risk, to develop new skills and have those opportunities to find employment and achieve that economic security.

These are just a few of the many programs that our government invests in. I'm very proud of these investments, as we continue to take meaningful steps towards equality for women.

CLIMATE CHANGE

CHANGEMENT CLIMATIQUE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is to the Premier.

Since the Premier failed to answer my question yesterday, I think we can assume that she did in fact write the Liberals' cap-and-trade bill at her kitchen table over the weekend. Unfortunately, the result has been a shoddy piece of legislation that the government is now rewriting on the fly.

To hide the mess she has created with this bill, the Premier has now ordered her members to stop government lawyers and officials from answering serious questions in committee.

So I have to ask, Speaker: Does the Premier think it's appropriate to muzzle government lawyers and officials when elected representatives ask tough questions about the cap-and-trade scheme?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: First of all, we have had four discussion papers on cap-and-trade and carbon pricing over the last 10 years.

Second, in the last year, we've spent an entire year consulting on what approach to take. The broad consensus from industry—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We've been a member of the Western Climate Initiative for a decade and worked on designing this with experts from across North America. In our one-year consultation, which was purely on whether we would use a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade system, we listened—

Mr. John Yakabuski: No more Twitter for you, Glen, if that code of conduct passes.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All right, I've a good memory. The member from Renfrew, the member from Stormont and the member from Huron—Bruce—who asked the question—come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The strong consensus from experts, from the business environmental community, was to go with the cap-and-trade system, and that it not be revenue-neutral, that there was money to invest in the transformation of industry.

But the member has been talking over me, as she did—20-minute breaks, three times every committee, filibustering and destroying the entire committee process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: You know what, Speaker? No matter how they spin this, this—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Lisa, could you take some Kleenex to Glen for committee?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're not helping. I'm trying to get them to be quiet.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's two for you. Finish, please.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: No matter how they spin this, this government owns some of the worst legislation ever to hit this floor. Cap-and-trade is no different.

Again, back to the Premier: The environment minister admitted yesterday that the Liberals' cap-and-trade bill is "one of the most complex pieces of legislation ever introduced into the Legislature." A part of the complexity is the result of poor drafting. The Liberals have more than 70 amendments to their own bill, and now they're attempting to strong-arm committee members into rubber-stamping each of their changes. They are now even muzzling government lawyers and officials in committee to prevent these people from speaking the truth about the cap-and-trade system that they've devised. These tactics are not acceptable.

Will the Premier for once do the right thing, withdraw 172—Bill 172, to be specific—and begin developing a revenue-neutral plan?

L'hon. Glen R. Murray: Je pense que c'est un grand défi pour le parti de l'autre côté, parce que pour la majorité des amendements, c'est la traduction en français du mot «être» ou du mot «avoir». Ce n'est pas compliqué.

It's not complicated. These are lawyer, technical amendments that come with every bill. Why doesn't the opposition agree to quickly pass all of the legal, technical and translation matters and we'd be down to a couple of matters? Because they're trying to obstruct the bill and they've said that.

I want to thank the member for Toronto—Danforth—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I tried. The member from Huron—Bruce, second time.

Finish, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member for Toronto—Danforth and the third party, who have been incredibly constructive, have worked to improve this legislation and have been extremely facilitative.

The member for Huron—Bruce and her party have done nothing but delay, call breaks and prevent other members from actually discussing the bill.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last Friday, parents, along with opposition MPPs, held protests across the province against the government's decision to remove children five and over from essential autism therapy. While most Liberal MPPs refused to make contact with parents and defend themselves, some made factually incorrect statements, claiming the creation of 16,000 new IBI spaces. When it comes to our most vulnerable kids, you would think that the government members would at least understand the devastating impacts of their decisions.

The minister is about to get up and claim that, in the name of science, she had to remove children five and over from the list. That's simply not true. Can the minister tell me on what page the clinical expert committee recommends kicking children with ASD over five off the list?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very proud of the changes we're making to the autism service program in the name of children in this province. I'm also very proud of all of the MPPs on this side of the House.

If others on the other side of the House actually met with their constituents and actually received people in their offices on Friday—I did the same thing. I continued to talk to families about the changes to this program. It's very important that we have those conversations so that the facts are clear and so that the new investment of \$333 million—it's understood how that will be used and it is understood that there will be 16,000 new therapy spaces for children going forward.

It's very important to note that we are not removing children from services; we're moving them from wait-lists and putting them into immediate service. It's very important that kids get continuity of service.

1150

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Since the minister did not answer my question, I guess that the report did not say what she's claiming that it does. If the report doesn't recommend removing children five and over with ASD from the list, then this must be about money. Children with ASD should not be paying the price for this government's failure to invest properly in—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Finish, please.

Miss Monique Taylor: This government has already failed children with autism, forcing them to wait years on

a list, and is now telling them that they will never get access to that therapy just so that this government could make a good-news PR announcement about reducing the wait-list. That's shameful.

This is leaving lives hanging in the balance. Speaker, will the minister do the right thing and immediately reverse her decision to remove children five and over with ASD from the list of essential therapy?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Yes, of course I've read the clinical expert committee. Anyone who's read it will understand that their advice is that there are better outcomes to be achieved for children in those early developmental windows. We're acknowledging that. But at the same time, Speaker—

Miss Monique Taylor: Right, but it doesn't say they can't get it after five.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton Mountain asked the question. Please come to order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: As I said before, we are taking children off wait-lists. I agree: Those wait-lists are unacceptable. I will not, as the Minister of Children and Youth Services, stand here and let wait-lists grow to five years by 2018. More importantly, we need to make sure that the services the children get under the new enhanced program will be longer in duration, will be as intense as needed, and will be very individualized to what the child needs.

This is based on clinicians' expertise and advice, Speaker. That's how the Autism Ontario program works. We'll continue to support children with autism in this province.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Chris Ballard: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Minister, spring is in the air and Ontarians from all across the province are looking forward to getting seasonal Ontario fruits and vegetables from their local farmers' markets and grocery stores. In Newmarket and Aurora, shoppers have two great farmers' markets to attend: one in Newmarket and one in Aurora.

The Local Food Fund successfully supported Ontario producers, processors and organizations with innovative projects that increase supply and awareness of food grown, made and harvested in our great province. But the Local Food Fund ended this March.

Local food organizations and businesses in my riding and in the nearby Holland Marsh are concerned that government has abandoned its commitment to support local food. Can the minister please tell the House how the government is supporting local food without the Local Food Fund?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora for that great question.

First of all, let me assure this House that we remain resolute in our support of local food. In fact, tomorrow morning, I will take part in a consultation with organizations like Food and Beverage Ontario, the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance and Metro to discuss enhancing local food access.

Since our government took office in 2003, we have invested more than \$170 million to support sales of Ontario foods. That includes the Local Food Fund, which we launched in 2013 with a three-year commitment. We've plowed on on this and have had a successful harvest over the last three years. Building on the success of the Local Food Fund, we're partnering with the Greenbelt Fund to continue delivering local food programming for all of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thanks to the minister for that answer.

My question again is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. I'm truly glad to hear that our government continues to support local food. As the minister knows, I regularly meet with farmers in the Holland Marsh area to get an on-the-ground report about how they're doing. Through the ups and downs of the business, they appreciate our government's commitment to promote Ontario-grown fruits, vegetables, grains, live-stock, poultry and more. I'm sure they will also appreciate that the province is still funding local food programming through the Greenbelt Fund.

But the Local Food Fund was open to organizations across the province. Can the minister expand on the government's investment in the Greenbelt Fund and clarify whether businesses and organizations across Ontario will have access?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member for his great supplementary and his keen interest in Ontario's food sector.

We are investing \$6 million over the next three years in (1) the Greenbelt Fund, to support marketing activities to celebrate local food champions, and (2) the local food investment fund, for projects which will improve food literacy, enhance access to locally grown foods, and encourage the use of local foods in the broader public sector.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker: The local food investment fund is open to all applicants across this great province. Whether you're in Thunder Bay or Essex or, as I was yesterday, in the town of Simcoe and the community of Delhi, you will have access to our local food programming.

Here's food for thought: Supporting local food is a great way to grow the economy and great jobs in communities big and small. That's why our government stands firmly behind our commitment to local—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, who is making his way back to his seat, I see.

The Current River generating station in Thunder Bay has been in operation for almost 30 years. Recent changes to legislation have raised questions about this small-scale hydro facility's ability to operate into the future. The proponent in this case, a Métis citizen, has been writing to the provincial government for two years, seeking consultation on the potential impacts of Ontario government policies, with no response.

Minister, I think you will agree that two years is an extremely long time to wait to receive an answer on whether the provincial government will choose to consult on a project or not.

So I ask, through the Speaker, will the minister commit to consult with the Métis Nation of Ontario on this project, as has been requested of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Ministry of the Environment, in accordance with the constitutional rights of the Métis Nation of Ontario?

And will the minister commit that the Ontario government will not make any decisions or take any action on these files prior to consultation, and commit to abide by—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, I am unaware of the specific situation that the member speaks of, but I'm happy to speak with the member afterwards, get the details of the parties involved, and look into the matter and report back to you as soon as possible.

But we do have a very healthy relationship with the Métis Nation of Ontario which we're very proud of. We work together with the Métis Nation of Ontario in very constructive ways.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Whitby–Oshawa has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Education concerning Laurentian University in Barrie—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): May I finish, please?

This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Windsor–Tecumseh on a point of order.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I mentioned some people here from MPAC. I forgot to mention Carla Nell, who is MPAC's new vice-president of municipal and stakeholder relations. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce, for members of the Legislature, Mayor Walter Sendzik of St. Catharines, who is in the west members' gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, today we were joined by members of the West Hill ESL Centre. Twenty-five members visited, along with Paula Lo, their instructor.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. David Zimmer: On a point of order, Speaker, I, too, would like to introduce Grand Chief Benedict from the Akwesasne First Nation. Welcome, Grand Chief.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I guess I opened a door. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to welcome a constituent from my riding, Doug Inglis, to the Legislature today.

DEFERRED VOTES

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
MODERNIZATION ACT, 2016LOI DE 2016 SUR LA MODERNISATION
DES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 181, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on the motion for closure on the motion for second reading of Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1200 to 1205.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On April 11, 2016, Mr. McMeekin moved second reading of Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts.

Mr. Naqvi has moved that the question be now put.

All those in favour of Mr. Naqvi's motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anderson, Granville
Baker, Yvan
Ballard, Chris
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bradley, James J.
Chan, Michael
Colle, Mike

Hunter, Mitzie
Jaczek, Helena
Kiwala, Sophie
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Marie-France
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy

Murray, Glen R.
Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou

Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dong, Han
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fraser, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoggarth, Ann
Hoskins, Eric

Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milczyn, Peter Z.
Moridi, Reza

Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Thibeault, Glenn
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

Gravelle, Michael
Gretzky, Lisa

Milczyn, Peter Z.
Miller, Paul

Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Bisson, Gilles
Brown, Patrick
Clark, Steve
Coe, Lorne
DiNovo, Cheri
Fedeli, Victor
Fife, Catherine
Forster, Cindy
French, Jennifer K.
Gretzky, Lisa

Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hatfield, Percy
Hillier, Randy
Horwath, Andrea
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
MacLeod, Lisa
Mantha, Michael
Martow, Gila
McDonnell, Jim
Miller, Paul
Munro, Julia
Natyshak, Taras

Nicholls, Rick
Sattler, Peggy
Scott, Laurie
Singh, Jagmeet
Smith, Todd
Tabuns, Peter
Taylor, Monique
Thompson, Lisa M.
Vanthof, John
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakubuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 52; the nays are 41.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Mr. McMeekin has moved second reading of Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1209 to 1210.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anderson, Granville
Armstrong, Teresa J.
Baker, Yvan
Ballard, Chris
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Chan, Michael
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
DiNovo, Cheri
Dong, Han
Fife, Catherine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Forster, Cindy
Fraser, John
French, Jennifer K.

Hatfield, Percy
Hoggarth, Ann
Horwath, Andrea
Hoskins, Eric
Hunter, Mitzi
Jaczek, Helena
Kiwala, Sophie
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Marie-France
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Mantha, Michael
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine

Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Naqvi, Yasir
Natyshak, Taras
Oraziotti, David
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sattler, Peggy
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Takhar, Harinder S.
Taylor, Monique
Thibeault, Glenn
Vanthof, John
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Brown, Patrick
Clark, Steve
Coe, Lorne
Fedeli, Victor
Hardeman, Ernie

Harris, Michael
Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
MacLeod, Lisa
Martow, Gila
McDonnell, Jim
Munro, Julia

Nicholls, Rick
Scott, Laurie
Smith, Todd
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakubuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 69; the nays are 24.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I move that we send Bill 181 to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So ordered.

There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1213 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, I rise to speak on GO Transit expansion. As a daily user of GO Transit, I can tell you with certainty that Durham region needs infrastructure help. A recently released study showed very positive numbers if GO expands in Durham region. The study findings indicate it would generate \$1.1 billion in transit-orientated walkable urban development, up to 20,000 new permanent jobs and 6,000 new homes.

Durham region is growing at an unprecedented rate, but with the growth come infrastructure obstacles. Durham is lagging behind other areas of the GTA and has waited patiently and long enough for expanded all-day GO Transit services.

Our municipal partners, the region of Durham, business leaders, and colleges and universities are all on board. We all know that GO Transit extension is crucial, will end transportation woes for thousands of commuters and will mobilize private sector investment in our economy. Speaker, the time for action is now.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS SERVICES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, today I am using my time to speak to an issue of grave importance in my

riding of London-Fanshawe. We have seen many articles, incidents and questions being brought forward in this House due to the lack of mental health funding and supports in this province. Community-based service providers in the child and youth mental health system do not have the resources to keep up with the need for care.

Yet, despite the rapidly growing and widely accepted increase in demand, child and youth mental health centres have not had base funding increases in over a decade. The reality is that lack of priority funding for mental health is creating a crisis in our communities. When I tabled Bill 95, my intention was to help stem the problem by asking this government to recognize the efforts of the all-party select committee on mental health and the extensive consultation they conducted across the province.

My community is in dire need and I am focused on protecting all vulnerable Ontarians suffering from mental illness and addictions by ensuring they have access to programs and services, regardless of where they live. Therefore, I am urging this government to call Bill 95 forward rather than let it languish in committee. It's time that we get serious about the challenges in mental health in this province and stop putting band-aid solutions on vital issues in our communities.

EARTHQUAKE IN ECUADOR

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I would like to start off by offering my condolences to the millions of friends and family members mourning the tragic deaths of loved ones at the hands of the devastating earthquake that took place in Ecuador this past weekend.

Earlier this morning, I attended a press conference at city hall with Mr. Nicolas Trujillo, ambassador of Ecuador in Canada, and city councillor Cesar Palacio, where I was able to extend my condolences to the people of Ecuador on behalf of our Premier, Kathleen Wynne, and the government of Ontario.

More than 3,500 people were injured in Saturday's 7.8-magnitude quake, which ripped apart buildings and roads and knocked out power along the Pacific coastline, and that number is rising. Ecuador's earthquake death toll rose to 413, including a Canadian woman and her 12-year-old son.

This is the greatest tragedy in Ecuador in the last 67 years and the strongest earthquake to hit Ecuador since 1979. While world events too often showcase human violence and cruelty, let us focus today on the solidarity, compassion and mutual assistance displayed in the aftermath of this tragedy.

There is a large population of Ecuadorian Canadians in Ontario. The Ecuadorian community in Toronto is the largest, with over 100,000 residents. Many of those reside in my riding of Davenport and have many friends and family in Ecuador. My office will be assisting with plans for upcoming fundraisers to help those who have lost so much as a result of this tragedy, as well as in connecting people that want make donations to the Red

Cross and the Ecuadorian embassy. We must stand by Ecuadorians as they build a more robust society which will serve as an example of hope and solidarity. I'm truly devastated by the tragic aftermath and pledge to work with organizations in my riding to assist Ecuador on its road to recovery, which we know will be long and difficult.

WATERLOO-WELLINGTON SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING FAIR

Mr. Michael Harris: The Waterloo-Wellington Science and Engineering Fair is an annual event that brings together students in grades 7 to 12 from my region. These are the best young scientific minds in our region.

Earlier this month, over 200 projects involving over 300 students from about 30 different schools gathered at Bingaman's in Kitchener. Over 120 judges from local schools, universities, colleges, businesses and industries volunteered their time to judge the projects and provide valuable feedback to the students.

The students gain so much more value than simply having their projects judged according to this national standard. Their time at the fair provides students with an opportunity to hone their presentation skills by demonstrating their projects to each other and the general public. Participation in the fair also allows equal time to take part in science-related educational activities.

I congratulate all student participants, as the competition is quite rigorous. However, one participant in particular did catch my attention: Ruth Meyer of Centennial Public School in Waterloo. Her project, The Impact of Modelled Signalling in Roundabouts, made me proud as an MPP, knowing that legislation we debate here at Queen's Park resonates with the youth in our ridings.

I would like to congratulate, of course, all of the winners as they represent our region at the Canada-Wide Science Fair in Montreal. I sincerely congratulate all participants and volunteers of the Waterloo-Wellington Science and Engineering Fair. I would also like to thank the community members who encourage the development of the scientific and technological talents of young people in our region.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Vanthof: Since being elected, I spend a lot of my time and my staff spends a lot of time fixing outrageous hydro bills. I'm glad to say that some of those really outrageous ones have gone. But what we're left with now is the heart-breaking job of telling people that, no, their hydro bill is actually accurate, but still outrageous. Now they hear that because the province is using less power because other people can't pay for their hydro, their hydro bills are going up. This morning, we heard from the Minister of Finance, and he seemed to imply that hydro bills were going down, and they used the average over Ontario.

Well, you should look at rural Ontario where we're paying the low-density service charges, where sometimes the service charges are higher than the actual power cost. People in rural Ontario, especially seniors and people living on fixed incomes, are in energy poverty. When other people say, "Oh, that can't be"—one time, I was here and the Minister of Energy said, "Oh, it's just going up by a cup of coffee." People are having to choose between what they eat and if they heat, or if they one day have to cut the cord to what we thought was a necessity of life in a developed country. People are going to have to start making those decisions. That's an incredible shame in a powerful province like Ontario.

EVENTS IN NEWMARKET–AURORA

Mr. Chris Ballard: In some communities, the first sign of spring is a robin hopping along or tulips poking through the snow, but in my wonderful riding of Newmarket–Aurora, the first sign of spring is the Newmarket and Aurora home shows.

My community team and I had the pleasure of attending the Aurora home show this past weekend at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, organized by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, and just two weeks ago we attended the 20th annual Newmarket home show at the Ray Twinney Recreation Complex, run by the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce. This year, over 5,500 people attended that show, making it the largest home show in York region.

Both the Newmarket and Aurora home shows offer visitors a one-stop shopping experience for home decor, renovations, real estate, financial services, health products and services, and more. Besides being a phenomenal way to start spring, these home shows are very important to the businesses within our community. For some of the small businesses and vendors, both in Aurora and Newmarket, I'm told they represent up to 50% or more of their annual sales, booked over a short weekend. Of course, the home shows are not just a place to buy products and services for your home and health; they're social gatherings where neighbours reconnect after a long, dark winter.

1510

I'd like to take some time to thank the organizers from the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce for pulling these fantastic shows together.

BARBARA HORNER

Mr. Robert Bailey: I rise today to remember Barbara Horner, who passed away on April 12 at the age of 81.

A beloved mother, mother-in-law, grandmother and great-grandmother, Barb was also a former councillor and mayor of the village of Point Edward, as well as past warden of Lambton county.

Barbara Horner was first elected to the Point Edward council in 1977, and served the village for a total of 18

years. In her political career, Barb was a trendsetter. She was the first female councillor, deputy reeve and deputy mayor, which all contributed to her accomplishing her ultimate goal of becoming the first female mayor of Point Edward, from 1997 to 2000. In 1984, she was elected by her peers to become the first lady warden of Lambton county.

Another highlight of Barb's life was being the chairman of the board of Lambton College for four consecutive years. This opportunity included a four-week Asian tour to open a relationship with China to establish an academic partnership with Lambton College, which still exists today.

Barbara very much enjoyed her many years in politics. She often said that most politicians were pleasant, outgoing people who were a pleasure to work with. During her term as mayor in 2000, her council simultaneously negotiated the opening of the Point Edward casino and a first contract for OPP policing.

I'd like to express my condolences to the entire Horner family and the village of Point Edward for their loss.

CAMBRIDGE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Last month, the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce gave those in my community of Cambridge an opportunity to recognize the contribution of local businesses and individuals to the continued growth and success of our community.

The annual Business Excellence Awards ceremony took place on March 24. Winners of the Business Excellence Awards are businesses or individuals who have shown their commitment to positive business development, growth and diversity within their city.

Winners of this year's awards include:

—Business of the Year for one to 49 employees: Brick Works Academy;

—Business of the Year for over 50 employees: Farm Mutual Reinsurance Plan Inc.;

—Personal Business Achievement Award: Jen Germann Wright, whose daughter, Meg Wright, told me how proud she was of her mother;

—New Venture of the Year Award: FusionCast;

—the Keith Taylor Memorial Award to Lieutenant Colonel Ronald F. Gowing;

—the Young Entrepreneur of the Year—one of the more important ones for our young entrepreneurs: Stephanie Soulis from Little Mushroom Catering;

—the WOWCAMBRIDGE.COM Award to Shelbee Frasier, Valet Car Wash Inc.;

—the Environment Award–Excellence in Energy Conservation to Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada Inc.;

—the Chairs Award to Knapp Fasteners Inc.;

—the Lifetime Achievement Award: the Honourable Gary Goodyear; and finally,

—the Rotary Scholarship Award for Academic Excellence: Caitlin Beacock.

Thank you so much to all the winners for making sure that your businesses add immeasurably to our community.

JOSEPH BRANT HOSPITAL

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Last year, I was joined by my colleagues the Minister of Health and the MPP for Halton to celebrate the ground-breaking for the expansion and modernization of Joseph Brant Hospital in my riding of Burlington.

As part of a \$370-million investment by the province, Joseph Brant is making significant renovations to give patients faster access to the right care. They're also constructing a seven-storey patient tower. Based on best practices and evidence from other leading hospitals, this tower will contain new patient rooms, a new emergency department and state-of-the-art operating rooms.

I recently had the pleasure of taking a guided tour of these rooms at a mock-up facility arranged by the hospital to showcase the kind of patient experience that we will achieve in our new community hospital. I was amazed to experience state-of-the-art design, created to promote patient- and family-centred care. Not only are these rooms designed to reduce the spread of infection; they are also designed for the future, with the ability to adapt to new technology down the road. Residents are invited to tour these mock-up rooms at a public open house tomorrow from 5 to 7 p.m.

Burlington is fortunate to have a community hospital—one that not only serves the people who live in my riding, but one that has been built with pride by that same community. As my constituency office is located just down the street from this growing hospital, it has been a wonderful experience to see the progress each and every day. Together with the generous citizen donors of Burlington and the city of Burlington, our government is delivering on our promise to provide patients with faster access to the care they need close to home. I would like to thank everyone who is making it a reality.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EQUAL PAY DAY

JOURNÉE DE L'ÉQUITÉ SALARIALE

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise in the Legislature today to recognize April 19 as Equal Pay Day in Ontario. In observance of the day, Speaker, I'm happy to share time on the floor today with my colleague the Honourable Tracy MacCharles, who is the minister responsible for women's issues.

Equal Pay Day is a day that's calculated each year in countries around the world to mark the extra time it takes a woman to earn as much money as a man. The truth is that in Ontario, we provide very high-quality education to both our girls and our boys—then we do not let women achieve equal success in the workplace. We need to change that.

I want to acknowledge the advocates, the community leaders and those who work each and every day in this province to end gender wage discrimination. Since I rose last year, Speaker, we've put a lot of work in towards closing the gender wage gap here in the province. I'm pleased to tell the House that today the Ministry of Labour posted online a summary of our public and stakeholder consultations that took place over the last fall and the winter.

Our Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee and the staff that support it have solicited ideas and views from the public in town hall meetings right across this great province. They've held group and one-to-one meetings with 700 stakeholders and key parties all over this province. Our steering committee has also had over 1,400 responses to an online survey, and we've consulted broadly internally within the provincial government.

Closing the gap is going to require effort from government, from business, from labour and from others in our society. As well, the committee and the staff have conducted detailed research into how the gender wage gap is being addressed in other jurisdictions around the globe. We've had a busy year, Mr. Speaker, but the work continues.

The steering committee of which I spoke—which Minister MacCharles and I met with earlier today—is busy distilling and analysing all it has heard into a very firm and concrete set of recommendations on how we should close the gender wage gap in the province of Ontario. For each of those recommendations, we'll develop a strategy that is going to close the gap.

Today what I want to do is to recognize the work of two very outstanding Ontarians who were the external advisers on the steering committee. Linda Davis is the past president of the Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Ontario, of which she is currently an executive board member, as well as the board's Equal Pay Coalition representative. Dr. Parbudyal Singh is a professor of human resource management at York University right here in Toronto. Dr. Singh's research covers emerging

issues in human resource management, compensation practices, and labour relations.

Ms. Davis and Dr. Singh joined Ontario's Pay Equity Commissioner, Emanuela Heyninck, and my ministry's executive lead, Nancy Austin, to complete the committee. I and the whole House look forward to receiving the final report of this group, and the recommendations attached to it, later this year.

1520

Speaker, all of this began in the Premier's mandate letter to me. The Premier asked that I work with Minister MacCharles to lead the development of a wage gap strategy that will close the gap between men and women in the context of the 21st-century modern economy. It's an important task, and it's one that Minister MacCharles and I have been very, very pleased to take on together.

Today we recognize the critical role that women play in our economy, while reflecting on the sombre reality that women continue to earn less on average than men do right here in Ontario. Equal Pay Day is a reminder that we must dedicate ourselves to ending this discrimination once and for all, and ensuring that the important contributions that women make in our economy and to the province of Ontario are both fully valued and recognized.

We are making progress, but as long as there's a wage gap, we have so much more to do. Our goal has to be an Ontario where men and women have equal opportunity to achieve their full potential within a modern workplace, and thus contribute their maximum potential to Ontario's economic growth. Closing the gender wage gap is simply the right thing to do. It's a necessary part of this goal.

I thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to be able to present today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I recognize the Minister of Children and Youth Services, and responsible for women's issues.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It's my pleasure to rise to recognize April 19 as Equal Pay Day and to share the floor with my colleague the Honourable Kevin Flynn, the Minister of Labour.

It is sobering that in this day and age we still need to bring attention to the fact that women on average earn less than men throughout their working lives. Nearly half of Ontario's workforce is female, yet despite increased participation in the labour force, higher levels of education and increased skills, women still face significant barriers and disadvantages in employment compared to men.

Les femmes constituent près de la moitié de la main-d'oeuvre ontarienne. Cependant, malgré une participation accrue dans la population active, des niveaux d'éducation supérieurs et de meilleures compétences, les femmes se heurtent encore à des obstacles et à des désavantages importants dans le domaine de l'emploi, par rapport aux hommes.

According to the available data, Speaker, Ontario's gender wage gap between men and women ranges from between 12% to 31.5%. Significantly, this gap actually widens for groups such as indigenous women, newcomer

women and women with disabilities. This is not acceptable. We must take action to close the gender wage gap once and for all.

When women do not have access to the same opportunities as men, we all lose. The gender wage gap means that there are productivity losses to the entire economy, and Ontario's families have less disposable income.

The facts are there, but what are we doing about it? In 2014, the Premier asked my colleague the Minister of Labour and myself to lead the development of a wage gap strategy. A steering committee was formed. They were brought together to consult with diverse groups from across the province to give us their best advice on how to close the wage gap. The committee's recommendations will be presented a little bit later this year, and I look forward to hearing their advice on the best way to take concrete action to close the gap and help women reach their full potential.

Speaker, Ontario's Pay Equity Act has been viewed as one of the most progressive pay equity statutes in the world. Ontario is the first province to recognize Equal Pay Day so that we can acknowledge the vital role of women in the economy. We have been working vigorously to support the advancement of women in the labour market. However, the fact that the wage gap still exists points to the need to do more.

As I mentioned earlier, women make up half of the Ontario workforce. They also represent more than half of our post-secondary grads. Yet women are still under-represented in many areas in the private sector, and that's why we have to take action to increase the representation of women on corporate boards and in senior management positions.

Increasing the number of women on boards and in senior positions is good for the economy, good for business and critical for gender diversity in corporate Ontario. Research actually shows that gender diversity in corporate leadership is linked to improved governance and stronger performance in both financial and non-financial measures.

We've taken bold action to respond to the alarming statistic that only 20.8% of board members on the top 60 companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange/Standard and Poor's index are women. Ontario was the first Canadian jurisdiction to implement the "comply or explain" regulation, in December 2014, which requires companies listed on TSE to report publicly on their approaches to increasing the number of women on their boards and in executive positions. Other Canadian jurisdictions have followed suit.

There have been some early successes. A report by the Canadian Securities Administrators reveals that 15% of all corporations surveyed added one or more women to their board in the prior year. However, 51% of corporations surveyed did not have any women on their boards; and in the mining, oil and gas, and technology industries, 60% didn't have any women at all on their board.

Further bold action is, indeed, required to improve the representation of women in corporate leadership. In the

2015 fall economic statement, the Ontario government announced that I will be co-chairing, with the Minister of Finance, a steering committee that will work to improve the representation of women on boards and in senior executive positions. We're finalizing those details and establishing the committee. We've also hired expert consultants to develop a report that will assess how corporations have responded to the "comply or explain" regulation and provide recommendations to the government and business on how to further promote women in leadership.

Speaker, last year I led an engagement session with corporate executives to learn more on how to promote women in the mining industry, both on the front lines and in leadership positions.

To level the playing field for women in the workplace, our government has increased wages by up to \$2 an hour plus benefits for early childhood educators and other child care professions in licensed child care settings. We also granted an increase of up to \$20 per day for home child care providers working with licensed home child care agencies this year. We've also set a new base rate for personal support workers, starting at \$16.50 an hour, up from \$14 hourly. We will increase this total hourly wage by up to \$4 over the next three years. And we announced \$120 million over three years in new funding dedicated to building 4,000 safe, high-quality, new licensed child care spaces in schools across the province. We've already allocated more than \$80 million of this funding, resulting in 2,901 new licensed child care spaces coming to communities across Ontario.

That's not all. Through the Ontario Women's Directorate, we've been working hard in progressive ways to help low-income women gain new skills.

Ce n'est pas tout. Par l'entremise de la Direction générale de la condition féminine de l'Ontario, nous travaillons dur et de façon progressiste afin d'aider les femmes à faible revenu à acquérir de nouvelles compétences.

The Women in Skilled Trades and Information Technology Training Program gives low-income women training to get better-paying jobs. It provides provincially certified training plus apprenticeships in the skilled trades, and certification and work placements in information technology. Our microlending program for women in Ontario helps women grow and build their own business. The Employment Training for Abused/At-Risk Women Program helps women who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing domestic violence regain self-confidence and safety, learn employable skills and find jobs or better-paying work. Thousands of women have benefitted from these programs, Speaker, and I'm immensely proud of each and every one of them.

A key part of building women up is encouraging them to consider careers in non-traditional sectors that will provide opportunity and pay well. That's why I'm delighted that every year, 40% of university grads in the important STEM sector—science, technology, engineering and math—are women.

Progress like this is absolutely essential to closing the wage gap and building a fair and prosperous Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's time for responses.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise and speak to the issue of the gender wage gap on behalf of our leader, Patrick Brown, and my PC caucus colleagues. I'll be sharing my time with my colleague from Wellington-Halton Hills.

1530

When I spoke in recognition of International Women's Day, I referenced the World Economic Forum's report saying it would take until 2133 to achieve global gender parity, which is far too long. The gender wage gap is a complex issue that is contributed to by several factors, including workplace discrimination, unequal gender representation in the workplace, and a higher proportion of caregiver responsibilities falling to women. This issue is especially evident for women who are minorities, indigenous or living with disabilities.

Social service providers in child care, welfare and development services are predominantly female-dominated jobs. The proxy pay equity obligations are a heavy financial burden and are creating a wage gap between agencies. The government is not leading on this issue, as it has stopped paying these agencies the base funding needed to match obligated increases under pay equity. I'll give you examples: I'm sure we've all had meetings with Community Living and Horizon groups in our ridings, and they are amongst those that have an outstanding liability across the field.

Several reports have also highlighted the inequality of the average working woman in Ontario making approximately 70% of every dollar a man makes. As incomes rise, the disparity grows. Even among the best-paid 10% of women, their earnings are 37% less than top-earning men. In every occupational category, even female-dominated fields such as health care, the average annual earnings of women are less than men's pay.

As Ontario's health care system has suffered a cut of \$815 million from physician services, a \$50 million cut to the physiotherapy and a cut of 50 medical residency positions, this not only negatively impacts the health of Ontarians, but stifles the economic prosperity and stability for women who choose careers in health.

Promoting awareness of the gender wage gap, increasing access to education for women and girls, and empowering them to seek meaningful careers in any field are important steps that we all must take.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Wellington-Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Speaker, our Ontario PC caucus—and I would hope all members of this House—supports the principles of equity and fairness for all employees. Everyone deserves equal pay for equal work, regardless of their gender, race, or ethnicity. And no one—I repeat, no one—should earn less for doing the same job simply because they're a woman.

The employers I know and that I talk to would also agree with these principles. They want to treat their

employees fairly and want to pay them the wages and salaries that they've earned and that they deserve.

Women are educated. Women are dedicated. Women are talented. They now make up a majority of our university graduates. There is simply no excuse for the historical wage gap to persist.

We've been making progress. Governments of all political stripes have made a concerted effort to close the wage gap. In fact, in the last provincial election, a record 38 women were elected to this House as members of provincial Parliament, representing more than a third of all MPPs. That is progress on gender equality.

Our Ontario PC caucus is strengthened by outstanding female MPPs. The member for York-Simcoe, the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, the member for Nepean-Carleton, our deputy leader and member for Dufferin-Caledon, the member for Huron-Bruce, and the member for Thornhill are all brilliant, tireless, caring and effective MPPs. They are all leaders who do an outstanding job representing their constituents here at Queen's Park.

I also want to recognize the exceptional job that my friend Elizabeth Witmer does as chair of the WSIB. She was also a superb MPP during her time here, and she is the longest-serving MPP ever. It wasn't hard for me to support her during her run for leadership of our party in 2002, and she would have been an excellent Premier.

We've been making progress in other areas as well. According to the government of Ontario, the gender wage gap has slowly been narrowing over the past half century. Laws such as the 1987 Pay Equity Act have helped, but clearly there are still examples of sexism in the workplace and we still need to change attitudes.

The Ministry of Labour cites Statistics Canada data estimating that Ontario's gender wage gap ranges from 12% to 31.5%. Last fall, the Ministry of Labour launched the Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee to consult with Ontarians on how to close the wage gap. Those consultations recently ended and we look forward to seeing their results.

We need tangible and concrete steps to move forward to create a more equal society. We know that small business is struggling and can't deal with any more regulations, but we as members of provincial Parliament all play a leadership role in our communities. We have a responsibility to stand up and say that gender bias, in any form, is not acceptable. All women—our mothers, our wives and our daughters—deserve equal pay for equal work and shouldn't be asked to accept anything less.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: On behalf of my colleagues in the NDP caucus and NDP leader Andrea Horwath, I rise today, as the women's issues critic, to respond to the minister's statement on Equal Pay Day.

Ontarians who haven't heard of Equal Pay Day before could be forgiven for thinking that celebration is in order, for believing that April 19 must somehow mark the day that equal pay for men and women in this province has finally been achieved. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, Equal Pay Day tells us, on

average, how far into the next year a woman has to work in order to earn the same salary a man earned the year before. In other words, it takes almost 16 months for a woman to earn what men earned in 12—to get out of the red, so to speak, as signified by my red scarf today.

For immigrant women, indigenous women and women with disabilities, Equal Pay Day comes much, much later—closer to the summer than to the spring. For all of us, women and men, the day reminds us of how far we still have to go to close the gender wage gap, and unfortunately how little we have accomplished, not only since 2013 when the day was first observed in Ontario, but over the decades since the gap was first quantified.

While Equal Pay Day is common in jurisdictions around the world, it is because of the advocacy of the Equal Pay Coalition, and in particular the efforts of my NDP colleague the member for Parkdale-High Park, that we now recognize Equal Pay Day in Ontario. It provides an important means of raising awareness of the reality that women in this province continue to earn about 30% less than men. As we learned yesterday in a new report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the gap may be narrower or wider, but it exists across all occupations and all industries, regardless of age, income or level of education, whether in the public sector or the private sector.

New Democrats welcome the tabling of the Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee consultation summary today. Certainly, Ontario women have been waiting a very long time for government leadership to close the earnings gap, since the late 1980s when pay equity was hailed as the cornerstone of government gender wage gap strategies. As we have learned since then, however, equal pay legislation alone will not close the gap, especially when it is not enforced and especially when it is not adequately funded.

These issues were raised frequently during the government's Closing the Gender Wage Gap consultations, as noted in the summary report posted today. The report observes, "Some people said that the laws are not well enforced, are complex and difficult to access. Many suggested that the laws should be monitored and implemented in a proactive manner by government, instead of relying on an individual's complaint before an investigation is started." It also states, "We heard that there is a need for effective enforcement, proactive monitoring for compliance, support for those making complaints (especially for non-unionized workers), and amendments to the proxy provisions of pay equity...."

Another theme that was highlighted in the summary report is the recognition of child care as an essential strategy to eliminate the gap. The report states, "Child care was the number one issue everywhere." It concludes, "Almost everyone mentioned the need to provide high-quality, affordable and accessible child care as a priority issue to help working women and their families close the gender wage gap."

Consultation participants strongly supported a public system of early childhood education and care that is uni-

versal, high-quality and comprehensive, and for public funding to ensure both adequate wages and affordable fees. Yet the 2016 Ontario budget includes no new money for child care funding and no new investments to help reduce fees, despite the fact that for the second year in a row, Ontario reported the highest and least affordable child care fees in Canada, with long waiting lists for subsidies in many communities.

A recent report on fees across Canada found that the seven most expensive cities for child care are all in Ontario. This calls into question whether a gender lens was actually applied in the development of the 2016 budget, and it also raises concerns about how the minister responsible for women's issues is implementing that aspect of her mandate.

1540

I want to conclude with another issue that came up during the consultation, and that was the need to support women experiencing violence to maintain their employment. This can be done through initiatives like my private member's bill, Bill 177, to provide up to 10 days of paid leave for domestic violence or sexual violence. I hope that this will provide a catalyst for the government to move forward with my bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements. Therefore, it is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas demonstration schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs;

"Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstration schools and other special education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

"Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstration schools and other essential support services;

"Whereas freezing student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind; and

"Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstration schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential."

I pass this to page Deanna and affix my signature.

GUIDE AND SERVICE ANIMALS

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to read this petition for the first time in the House today.

"Expand AODA Service Animal Protection.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the expansion of coverage for guide and service animals under the AODA represents a huge step in the inclusion and dignity of all people, there are still gaps in the protection provided by current legislation and policy; and

"Whereas the AODA legislation fails to consider the protection and accommodation of:

"—dogs and animals in active training to become certified guide/service dogs/animals;

"—service dogs and animals who are trained with special skills related to non-disability identified illnesses, such as detecting oncoming seizures;

"—dogs specifically trained to offer specific emotional support to psychiatric consumer/survivors with diagnosis such as PTSD; and

"Whereas the Blind Persons' Rights Act, 1990 empowers the Attorney General to provide ID cards for guide dogs, which outline the current legal protection; and

"Whereas the AODA requires service animals to be accompanied by a physician's letter; and

"Whereas physicians' letters are inconsistent in content and style, resulting in their being denied, adding further confusion and indignity to the person presenting them;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce legislation expanding the AODA's definition of a protected service animal, and to empower the office of the Attorney General to provide ID cards for all protected guide and service animals/dogs."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page MacFarlane. That's a good Scottish name.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital is challenged to support the growing needs of the community within its existing space as it was built for a mere 7,000" emergency room "visits and experiences in excess of 33,000 visits annually; and

"Whereas the government-implemented Places to Grow Act forecasts massive population growth in New Tecumseth, which along with the aging population will only intensify the need for the redevelopment of the hospital; and

"Whereas all other hospital emergency facilities are more than 45 minutes away with no public transit available between those communities; and

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital deserves equitable servicing comparable to other ... hospitals;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Kathleen Wynne Liberal government immediately provide the necessary funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital for the redevelopment of their emergency department, operating rooms, diagnostic imaging and laboratory to ensure that they can continue to provide stable and ongoing service to residents in our area."

I agree with the petition and I will sign it.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition that continues to flow into my office on a regular basis. It reads:

"Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the wait-list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

I couldn't agree with this more. I'm going to affix my name to it and give it to page Zachary to bring to the Clerk.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas many parents and caregivers are being charged non-refundable fees to place their children on wait-lists for daycare centres;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees can range from tens to hundreds of dollars;

"Whereas due to the scarcity of quality daycare spaces, many parents and caregivers are forced to place their children on multiple wait-lists;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees impose a significant financial burden on parents and caregivers for the mere opportunity to access quality child care;

"Whereas daycare wait-lists are often administered in a non-transparent manner which creates the risk that they will be administered in an unfair and/or discriminatory manner;

"Whereas parents and caregivers in Ontario already face significant barriers accessing daycare due to high costs and limited numbers of daycare spaces ...

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize that we have a responsibility to take action now, and support a requirement for transparent administration of daycare wait-lists and a ban on non-refundable daycare wait-list fees."

I agree with this petition. I'm affixing my name to it and handing it over to Aarbi.

ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas, suddenly and without any consultation, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport has suspended the Ontario Trillium Foundation's \$25-million capital grants program; and

"Whereas this sudden decision will have a devastating effect on volunteer groups, non-profits and charitable organizations for whom Trillium funding is essential in maintaining facilities and enhancing their work to make communities across Ontario better places to call home; and

"Whereas Trillium is one of the few sources of capital funds for these groups and the suspension of this program will force them to do more fundraising for capital needs, placing a greater burden on the volunteers while reducing their capacity to improve lives in the communities they serve;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To recognize the Ontario Trillium Foundation's capital program is a lifeline for volunteer groups, particularly in rural and northern communities, and to immediately reinstate it's \$25-million budget."

I'll affix my signature and send it to the table with page Madeline. I agree with the petition 100%.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Percy Hatfield: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the day of mourning is a day to remember and honour those who have been killed, injured or who suffered illness as a result of work-related incidents and to honour their families. It also serves as a day to protect the living by strengthening our commitment to health and safety in all workplaces in Ontario for the common goal of preventing further deaths and injuries from occurring in the workplace;

"Whereas a workers day of mourning is recognized in more than 100 countries around the world;

"Whereas 1,000 Canadian workers are killed on the job each year and hundreds of thousands more are injured or permanently disabled;

"Whereas it is expected that more than 90% of workplace deaths are preventable and raised awareness of this fact is necessary. Every worker is entitled to a safe work environment, free of preventable accidents, and that we, as a province, are committed to reaching such a goal;

"Whereas our MUSH sector (municipal, universities, schools and hospitals) as leaders in their communities are not doing enough to recognize and raise awareness of the seriousness of workplace injury and death;

1550

"Whereas the flag symbolizes us as a province, and the lowered flag is a powerful symbol of our shared loss and respect, brings focus to the issues and symbolizes we are united on this front as a province at all levels, not divided;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support the workers of Ontario with swift passage of Bill 180, Workers Day of Mourning Act, 2016, that would require all publicly funded provincial and municipal buildings to lower their Canadian and Ontario flags on April 28 each year."

I agree. I give this to page Diluk to bring up to the desk.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Laurie Scott: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that

protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I agree, and I affix my signature and pass it to page Lauren.

WAY-FINDING SIGNS

Mr. Michael Mantha: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the MTO currently does not allow established trail way-finding signs on MTO highways, and way-finding signs are helpful in guiding cyclists in northern Ontario where we often have no other options than using MTO roads;

"Whereas cycling tourism has become a significant part of Manitoulin's tourist economy, with an established network of cycling routes, many of which cannot be done without travelling on portions of MTO highways;

"Whereas Manitoulin's economic development hinges on making tourists feel welcome and safe;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To allow way-finding signs on MTO roads in northern Ontario and to immediately allow a pilot project of way-finding signs on MTO road sections of cycling routes found in MICA's Manitoulin Island and LaCloche Mountains Cycling Routes and Road Map."

I agree with this petition and present it to page Madeline to bring it down to the Clerk's table.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Jim Wilson: "Whereas our present land leases with Parkbridge Lifestyle Communities Inc. are covered by the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 (RTA); however, they are exempted from the protection of rent controls under the act. Being part 1, section 6, subsection 2, and,

"Whereas the landlord has the option to increase the monthly land rental by \$50.00 above the existing rent, to a new purchaser, when a home is sold;

"Whereas 'Park Place' is a community of permanent homes located on leased lands whose residents are retired and living on fixed incomes. Continued rental increases beyond the guidelines of the RTA, is unsustainable to retired residents on fixed incomes;

"Therefore, we the undersigned residents of 'Park Place,' petition the Legislature to change the RTA to include rent controls for retirement type communities located on leased lands and, to delete the option given to landlords to increase land rental rates upon sale of a home in such communities. The foregoing would enable retirees to remain in their homes and enjoy their hard-earned retirement years."

I'm happy to sign that petition.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "Hydro One Not for Sale! Say No to Privatization.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

“Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

“Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don’t have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

“Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario’s Hydro One.”

I sign this petition and give it to Diluk for delivery.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

It’s signed by hundreds of my constituents, and I’ve also affixed my signature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The time for petitions has now ended.

VISITOR

Mr. Wayne Gates: I would like to welcome to Queen’s Park this afternoon Mr. John Thompson, a dentist from my riding of Niagara Falls. Thanks very much for coming, and I hope you enjoyed the afternoon.

OPPOSITION DAY

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I move the following motion:

Whereas any efforts at major electoral reform must be conducted in a fair, transparent and non-partisan manner in the interest of protecting the democratic process; and

Whereas Ontario has traditionally used an independent, consensus-based approach overseen by the Chief Electoral Officer as the basis for any legislative changes to the electoral process; and

Whereas any panels, bodies or committees historically tasked with electoral reform have maintained an equal number of representatives from Ontario’s major political parties and representatives from civil society in the interest of fairness and democracy,

Therefore, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should immediately establish the Ontario Advisory Panel on Political Finance Reform and Electoral Participation—the panel—to develop recommendations regarding rules governing the financing of political parties, electoral participation and third-party advertising; and

That the panel shall consist of an equal number of representatives from each political party that earned at least 3% of the popular vote in the 2014 Ontario general election; and

That the panel shall include a collection of members representing civil society, including labour, business, non-governmental organizations and academia that, in aggregate, equal the total number of political party members on the panel; and

That the chair of the panel shall be an independent, non-elected person selected from a list of candidates prepared by the Chief Electoral Officer, and appointed by consensus of the House leaders; in the absence of consensus, the appointment shall be made solely by the Chief Electoral Officer; and

That the panel shall have the authority to conduct public hearings throughout the province, undertake research and generally have such powers and duties as are required to develop recommendations on the new rules governing political party financing, electoral participation and third-party advertising, the basis of which may inform any new legislation; and

That the Chief Electoral Officer shall serve as secretary to the panel and Elections Ontario shall provide administrative and budget support; and

That the Chief Electoral Officer shall table the panel’s final report with the assembly no later than September 30, 2016. In the event that the Legislature is not sitting, the report shall be submitted to the Speaker, who shall lay the report before the assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 3.

Back to Ms. Horwath. I recognize you now.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much. I recognized you, too. I’m only kidding.

It’s my pleasure to rise and debate this motion today because it’s an extremely important day here in Ontario.

For the first time that I can remember, earlier today, I stood with the leader of the official opposition, as well as the leader of the Green Party of Ontario. Together, the

three of us called on the Premier to support an independent, transparent and, above all, fair process for reforming how elections and political parties are funded in this province.

1600

Speaker, we did this because, fundamentally, we believe that the people of Ontario deserve to know that their voice matters, that Ontarians should have total faith in their political system, and that having the ear of the government isn't dependent on how deep your pockets are. There is no question that we must reform the laws that govern our democracy and ensure that politics and government in Ontario isn't under the influence of big money. But how we get there is just as important. Process matters. What Ontarians deserve is a process that's above question, a process that actually builds faith in our democracy, because after weeks of front pages filled with allegations that it's only the big donors who get access to this government, Ontarians' faith has been shaken.

But fixing our system cannot be left in the hands of any single political party or any group of parties, especially not the Liberal Party and the Liberal Party alone. Because after watching Liberal scandal after Liberal scandal, from Ornge to eHealth, the gas plants to the Sudbury bribery scandal, and now a ministerial fundraising scandal—after decades of scandal—Ontarians have grown cynical with politics in our province. Their faith has been shaken.

But there is still hope. We have an opportunity to restore trust in their democratic process, in this Legislature, and, yes, in us as leaders of this province. There is now a growing consensus that it's time to get the influence of big money out of politics and out of government, and particularly out of government decision-making here in the province of Ontario. In fact, that is the issue that has driven us to the point that we are at now, particularly when it comes to the Liberals and the Liberal cabinet and their habits that, if they do not skirt the law, certainly are problematic in terms of how people perceive what the Liberals have been doing when it comes to fundraising.

We have an opportunity to get it done, Speaker. We have an opportunity now to get it done for—and, more importantly, by—Ontarians.

As Canada's Supreme Court noted in a 2004 ruling, "Electoral fairness is key. Where Canadians perceive elections to be unfair, voter apathy follows shortly thereafter."

We have a choice today, Speaker. We can create a process that takes the politics out, or we can have the Liberal system which puts all the power in the backrooms of the Premier's office. We can create a process that's open, transparent, independent, nimble and fast-moving. We can have recommendations before this House by the end of September, but create rules that have the potential to last beyond the next election cycle.

Reforming how we finance our democratic process in a way that Ontarians can trust is fair can be done through the establishment of an Ontario Advisory Panel on Political Finance Reform and Electoral Participation. An in-

dependent panel bringing together political parties, including the Green Party, as well as the public and members of civil society like labour, business, NGOs and academics—that kind of independent panel could be chaired by a neutral party outside of this Legislature and the process steered by Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer, as was outlined in the motion. Once assembled—and that can be done very quickly—the panel would immediately begin to hold hearings, commission research, and develop recommendations for getting the influence of big money out of Ontario politics. They would make those recommendations, as I said, to the Legislature on or before September 30, 2016, leaving plenty of time for legislation to be drafted and passed before the end of the year.

That means no delay, Speaker. So notwithstanding how much the Liberals and the Premier, her cabinet members and her MPPs like to pretend that we're talking about a long-drawn-out process, in fact, we're talking about a consultation period at the front end by which then legislation is drafted. In other words, we're doing it in the proper order so that people actually get the input, they get to shape what the actual legislation looks like, instead of what the Premier wants, which is to write it up herself and then take it to consultation, which, frankly, is putting the cart before the horse. If we're going to have new rules established, they have to be done in such a way as to ensure that there is faith and trust in what comes out at the end of the process. If the process is one that is simply driven by the majority Liberals in this House, then it is not a process that will have widespread acceptance and widespread trust from the public.

That's what the crux of this issue is: Does the Premier want to be undemocratic in terms of electoral reform or does she want to do what the Supreme Court frankly thinks we should be doing, and that is making sure that we are building up people's trust in democracy, building up people's belief in or value in our government and our government systems? Are we going to do what Kathleen Wynne wants to do, which I believe will lead to more cynicism, as the Supreme Court suggested.

Anyway, what I'm saying is that the ground rules for the process that we've laid out in the motion are ground rules that create an open and transparent process and, most importantly, a process that Ontarians have faith in or can have faith in.

As I said, it's starkly in contrast to what the Liberals are wanting to do, which puts all of the power squarely in the Premier's office. She began by sketching out the legislation at home at her dining room table. She wants to draft the legislation in the Liberal backrooms and then send it to a standing committee where the Liberals have a majority and can vote down anything the Premier doesn't like. That is not the proper way to make amendments of this nature. It is not the proper way to address key changes to the way our elections are financed and operated.

It is absolutely inappropriate for her to take this position. Frankly, I am shocked, and I know many people

I've talked to in the last number of days are extremely disappointed and, frankly, dumbfounded by why this Premier, who claims to be so open and transparent, is shutting Ontarians out of a proper process for changing their democracy. It is very, very surprising.

The Premier says that there's a widespread consensus already, but, to date, I've seen no evidence of her attending any public meetings on the issue or any consultation with NGOs, business leaders or labour leaders. She hasn't consulted with Ontarians or the non-partisan experts who could add some advice and insight into this issue. By the time she met with myself and the leader of the official opposition, she had already written her plan at home on the weekend. We were astounded in a press conference after that meeting that she admitted to having it all worked out already by herself on the back of a napkin at her kitchen table. How ridiculous is that? And this is the kind of process we're expecting people to trust, where the Premier writes up what she thinks is the right thing on the back of a napkin at her dining room table?

Really, if there's one thing that shows why this needs to be a non-partisan activity, it's precisely because of the way this Premier has handled it already, which is very badly and undemocratically. This unilateral approach is not just an affront to our democratic process; it is also out of line with our political traditions here.

In the 1970s, political leaders across North America were faced with reform of election laws. Here in Ontario, Bill Davis was facing serious questions about fundraising ethics. In fact, this government needs to take a page out of Mr. Davis's book when it comes to ethics. However, I digress. Here in Ontario, he was facing those issues, the Premier of the day, and he could have made changes by majority rule. He could have made changes around the margins in a way that might have been able to benefit his own political party, the Progressive Conservatives of the day. Instead, that Premier showed his respect for democracy and his respect for Ontarians and showed the humility that is required of a person with so much power as the Premier of the province. That's what happened.

What he did was refer the issue to the Camp commission, a tripartisan commission. He said at the time—and I want Liberals to hear this, Speaker. This is the Premier of the day, who showed ethics, who showed an understanding of his true role: "I would want to maintain a political system in which the various parties can function and campaign ... in an atmosphere above and beyond public doubt, suspicion and cynicism."

1610

In response, the Camp commission recommended a permanent election finances commission made up of nominees from the three political parties, a non-partisan member of the Law Society of Upper Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer and a chair appointed by the Lieutenant Governor. In short, it was a non-partisan commission, very similar to the one we are currently proposing and that is supported by the PC caucus and leader, as well as by the leader of the Green Party of Ontario. For nearly 30 years, that non-partisan commission ensured that no one

party could rewrite election rules for their own partisan benefit. Sure, rules changed, but when they did, there was consensus and an agreement that they were fair to all parties.

For example, in 1986, Ontario introduced campaign spending limits. But, as noted by academics, the new rules "had been exhaustively considered by an ad hoc committee of party leaders, in the proceedings of which the commission" on election finances "was invited to attend." In other words, there was a consensus between the political parties and the commission, which included its non-partisan members.

Then, in 1998, it all changed here in Ontario, when Mike Harris unilaterally scrapped the election fairness commission without any consultation, without any discussion. At the time, the Liberal leader said that there are "simple rules of fairness.... You can't change the rules of the game without the consent of all the players involved."

What's happened, Speaker? That was the leader of the Liberal Party back in 1998. That makes sense to me. I think it makes sense to most people—well, at least on this side of the House, and I would say it would make sense to most Ontarians. The MPP for St. Catharines at the time called it an "anti-democratic strategy, hatched in the back rooms of the Premier's office." That kind of sounds like new rules hatched up on a dining room table, don't you think, Speaker?

John Gerretsen, the MPP for Kingston and the Islands, called these changes "a tragedy"—a tragedy. He said, "If there is one thing that we owe to future generations, it's certainly the fact that our electoral system, the manner in which we elect governments every four or five years, is done in a fair and open and straightforward manner. What's happening here?"—and let's recall that this is what a Liberal person, who went on to be a major cabinet minister in the McGuinty government, said about Mike Harris's decision not to have an open and democratic process any longer: "What's happening here," Mr. Gerretsen said, "is that the governing party that happens to be in power at any one time is going to have a distinct advantage above the normal advantages of incumbency. That simply isn't fair, and I hope the people of Ontario will speak out about this."

The Toronto Star editorial board weighed in, saying that:

"Traditionally, the rules governing elections—the ceiling on expenditures, the length of the campaign, and so on—have been changed only when there has been a consensus among the three parties in the Legislature.

"Otherwise, the government of the day could use its majority to push through any new rules that would be to its advantage."

Speaker, that's exactly what we're talking about right now.

As the Hamilton Spectator noted, "The government broke tradition yesterday by tabling proposed legislation affecting the Election Finances Act without first getting all-party consent."

And Maclean's wrote back then, "For 25 years, election financing bills in Ontario have been tabled with all-party consensus. But Ontario Premier Mike Harris tossed aside that tradition."

There's an interesting process playing out today in Manitoba, which shows that even when reforms are good, when there isn't a good process, it's people that end up losing. Starting in 2000, Manitoba banned corporate and union donations and ensured that only individuals could donate to political parties. They unilaterally created a system of public support, but without a robust process to make it a long-term solution. Now what we're seeing is the PC Party in that province making it a campaign promise to eliminate any public financing.

The rules that govern our democracy should be built to last. That is the point. The way you build them to last—and I'm glad the member for St. Catharines is here with us, because he could actually reiterate his own comments, his own words, from back in 1998. The rules should be built to last and not subject to the political whims of any party, either in government, opposition or on the campaign trail.

It's also worth looking at Ottawa. The Premier likes to talk about modelling changes here on the federal rules. The question is, which rules? The ones that Jean Chrétien passed in 2003, which were then thrown overboard by Stephen Harper in 2006? Or the rules that Harper changed again, without any consultation, ramming them through with their majority in 2011? Or does the Premier want to wait to see what Justin Trudeau does with his legislative majority?

Simply put, Ottawa doesn't provide a simple example of what to model the rules on, because in just over 10 years, we've seen four sets of rules. For over a decade, Liberals and Conservatives have been playing tit for tat with campaign finance laws, each trying to stack the deck against the other. That is not the best way to move forward. That is not the way to change the way our democracy works. Jean Chrétien opened the door to changing the rules on his own, and Stephen Harper was only too happy to follow right along. The lesson is that once one party starts changing the rules to suit their own political interest, it becomes a very slippery slope.

The Premier is creating a very real precedent here in Ontario. She's creating the precedent that any party with a legislative majority gets to change the rules for democratic fairness however they see fit, where they don't have to consult experts, where they don't have to look at best practices across Canada or around the world, where they don't need to engage civil society, and they no longer need a consensus from other political parties. Most disturbing of all, they are establishing a precedent for changing election rules that doesn't have any buy-in from Ontarians. The Liberal government is telling Ontarians that the rules governing democratic elections can change without any public stamp of approval.

Now, the Premier actually has a choice. She can follow in the footsteps of Mike Harris, or she can follow in the tradition of nearly 30 years of stability in this

province. As I said earlier, in 1998, the Toronto Star wrote that Mike Harris was opening the door to allowing "the government of the day [to] use its majority to push through any new rules that would be to its advantage." That's exactly what we're looking at right now. That's exactly what the Premier of this province, Kathleen Wynne, someone whom people expected much better of—I say to you, Speaker, when I talk to folks, they are shocked, they are dismayed and they feel betrayed by this Premier. They're disappointed to the nth degree in the behaviour of Kathleen Wynne. That's what's happening here in Ontario.

The government of the day—this Premier, this Liberal Premier—is using her majority to push through the rules that they want, and they will have a veto over rules that they don't want. Or they can actually do it the right way and open things up, because Ontarians deserve a process that is not driven by one political party and by one leader. When it comes to something as important as how we elect a government, we need to involve civil society, NGOs, business, labour, academics and, most importantly, the people of Ontario. A democracy is built on people. If we want people to engage in our democracy, to vote, to feel that the government is looking out for their best interests, they have to believe that the system is fair. That's what they have to believe. People have a right to know that election rules are not being rigged.

It is the case that that is what this government prefers: to do it all on their own, to do it all in the back rooms, and then to shop out to the public what they've already decided that they want to do. That is not the proper process. Let's reject a system where one party sets the rules for a whole democracy. Let's open this process up, make it fair, make it transparent, and make sure we get it right. Not for you, as the opposition, and not for them, as the governing party, and not for us, as the opposition, and not for Mr. Schreiner from the Green Party, but for Ontarians, because that's what Ontarians deserve. Let's get it right for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I am pleased to rise today and speak to the opposition motion.

While all three parties worked on these rules and abided by them over the years, I think that all of us here in the Legislature, from all parties, agree that change is needed when it comes to fundraising rules in Ontario. That's why our government has acted quickly and efficiently to move forward with reforming political donations.

1620

There is a process in place; we're using it. It's democratic. It's democracy at work. It's open and transparent. But what the opposition is proposing would disrupt the process and disrupt the progress we're making and slow things down. It would actually stall things. Other provinces and the federal government have already made changes; Ontario needs to do the same, and it's clear we must do it now.

Our government has laid out a course of action that is transparent and inclusive, one that includes all political parties and gives them all an opportunity to have their say, and yet it does things expeditiously, which is what the people out there have told us they want. It is a credible process that includes the engagement and input of the public and the opposition parties. We want to hear from them. We want them to be a part of the process. These are the rules for all of us.

This is why we're proposing sending the draft legislation to committee after first reading. By taking this additional step, it will allow for consultation immediately while the Legislature is still sitting. Continuing to press forward, this step would also allow for further consultation during the summer months. Our government has set out a clear timeline that could result in the bill being amended over the summer and passed by January 2017. I think that's great, and lots of time for consultations to occur.

The opposition motion would delay the entire process. This is not the time to play politics. We need to work together to implement these changes in a timely manner. All parties agree that we need to ban corporate and union donations, all parties agree that we need to reform the rules on third-party advertising, and all parties agree that we need to put controls on by-election donations. Our government's legislation does just this, but the opposition continues to argue against it. I think they're stalling, holding fundraisers according to the old rules while we're already taking some steps to move forward with some voluntary rules so that we can start abiding by some of the things proposed.

We're proposing concrete action to change political donations by introducing reforms in seven key areas:

- We're going to change third-party advertising rules, and a major part of that is constraining maximum spending limits during elections.

- We're banning corporate and union donations.

- We're reducing maximum donations to a figure that reflects what is allowed at the federal level.

- We're putting constraints on loans and loan guarantees.

- We're going to reform by-election donation rules.

- We'll reduce spending limits in election periods and introduce limits for the time between elections.

- We'll introduce leadership and campaign spending limits and donation rules.

Our government is committed to doing all of these things, and we're certainly open to adding more, which is exactly why we plan to hold summer consultations: so we can hear from the public, the private sector and our colleagues throughout the Legislature. All three parties would have the chance to invite organizations and individuals of their own choosing to appear during consultations. I think this sounds like a fairly democratic way to move forward. It's an opportunity for all of us to take part in a fair and democratic process to improve and reform political fundraising in Ontario. It's a solid plan.

I know that the Premier has worked hard on this. She doesn't have the luxury, as some people do, to work

between a 9-to-5 kind of commitment. The Premier works all the time. She works here; she works in her car; she works at home; she works in her office.

Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? I feel I have to say something about this—about the comments that I'm hearing in this House about people working at kitchen tables. I don't know exactly where the Premier worked on these proposals, but I have to say that I am offended by the suggestion that there is something wrong with working after hours or even working at the kitchen table. In my household, some of the most important decisions in our family occurred at the kitchen table. My kids work on their homework at the kitchen table, I came up with some important things that I wanted to do when it came to changing my life at the kitchen table, and it's where negotiations happen with our family—at the kitchen table. So I am actually offended by the idea that for some reason the kitchen table has no place in decision-making when it comes to Ontarians. I tend to disagree with that.

Interjections.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you.

So far, neither of the opposition leaders has opposed the changes that we are proposing, but they—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Sometimes, when nothing is said, it is more and has greater effect. Consider yourself being referenced. Let's show some respect to our member as she continues along with the debate.

To the member from Halton, please continue.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These rules affect all of us. We need to set political partisanship aside and work together toward a common goal.

Our government is working hard to do the right thing. We're trying to expedite legislation that is transparent and credible. We're committed to changing political donations in Ontario, but the opposition seems committed to delaying the process. I hope that we can see past our political differences and work together on this.

Our government remains steadfast in its efforts to reform fundraising. We're committed to ensuring a process that is open, transparent and fair, and we want to include the opposition parties every step of the way. These are reforms that affect each and every person in this Legislature and that affect all parties.

I'm hopeful and optimistic that we can work with the opposition parties to get this done. Let's change the rules. Let's do it together.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I'm happy to rise today in support of the NDP opposition day motion.

As I mentioned this morning, the fact that three leaders from different political stripes all joined together in a sign of unity shows the importance of this issue. Unfortunately, there was one party not represented. There was one party that chose to ignore the input from others. It has become clear that this Liberal government is afraid

of an open and transparent process to develop the rules surrounding political financing reforms. The Liberal Party wants to run the process, have it run by the Premier's office, run by the Liberal Party.

This is a disappointing departure from history, a departure from previous precedent. Bill Davis, the great Progressive Conservative Premier, worked with all parties, worked with all members of the House in a non-partisan way. When we had similar changes in Ottawa in the federal government, there was a commission set up by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. Afterwards, with the Federal Accountability Act, it was in a minority Parliament in which all parties could have their say. No one could simply control and ramrod decisions with their majority. Those are the traditions of developing the rules by which our democracy operates. Sadly, the Liberal government wants to choose a different path.

We all agree that the Premier's meeting with the party leaders last week was nothing more than a PR stunt. She wasn't open to any suggestions or discussion. Instead, Mr. Speaker, this legislation will be drafted behind closed doors, with no consideration of the views of the opposition or the general public.

Mr. Speaker, the Ontario PC caucus believes that major electoral reform should not be left solely in the hands of one of Ontario's political parties. While we support the principles behind the NDP motion, we believe that the scope could be even broader. That's why, a few weeks ago, we proposed a select committee that included the Integrity Commissioner and the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

I would note that the timelines could be even more expeditious. The Liberals tried to use as an excuse, "Well, it couldn't be done as fast." That is counter to fact, that is counter to reality, because you could have had a UC a week ago. You could have had a UC two weeks ago. Whether it is the advisory panel put forward by the NDP or our select committee, you could have had that up and running. You could have been discussing this in a substantial way. This has nothing to do with time limits. This only has to do with the Liberal Party and the Premier's office wanting to dictate exactly what the rules of our election financing will be.

1630

The solution must involve all three parties—including the Green Party, so four parties equally—as well as the legislative officers who police the conduct of members and their staff. In addition, the public needs to have the ability to have its say on this topic.

The Liberal government has lost credibility on this issue. They cannot be trusted to develop a solution. After all, the reason we're discussing this is the incredible work that the press gallery did exposing how the Liberal Party had blurred the lines between the role of government and the role of the Liberal Party's fundraising. This is because of the Liberal donation scandal; that's the only reason they want to talk about it. When we had private members' bills put forward from our caucus in 2014 and 2015 dealing with this, they voted them down. They had

no interest. The only reason they're talking about it today is because they got caught.

I would say that there is a lot of commonality in the NDP proposal for an advisory panel and our proposal for a select committee. I think their proposal has a lot of merit and is heading in the right direction, but let me take this opportunity to add what we would additionally like to have looked at.

It's important that we have this conversation around fundraising, around our election finance rules. We need to address the unfortunate reality that ministers in the Liberal government have fundraising targets. The Premier has admitted to that fact. It leaves the impression, it leaves the appearance, that we have a pay-to-play system in Ontario. This is why we need to actually have the Conflict of Interest Commissioner on the select committee, because this directly relates to the appearance of conflict of interest that everyone in Ontario now sees. Everyone has read these newspaper articles. Everyone has seen these television stories highlighting how the line of what's appropriate appears to have been crossed.

I don't know why the Premier and the Liberal Party are going to such steps, using their majority not to have the Conflict of Interest Commissioner involved in this process and on the committee.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What have they got to hide?

Mr. Patrick Brown: What are they hiding?

What's more, under the current rules, there is a complete, giant—more than a loophole; you could drive a Brink's truck through it. There are loopholes on lobbying rules. I don't know why they wouldn't want to have that as part of the conversation.

Under the current rules, a former senior adviser to a Liberal minister could go to work for a company in the same sector as their respective ministry. Their company could then donate to the Ontario Liberal Party and subsequently win government contracts. That kind of direct lobbying from the people who have an inside track with ministers just doesn't pass the smell test.

I raised an example in question period where there was an individual who worked for the Minister of Energy who then had a record of working for companies seeking contracts, and donated in his lifespan 194 times. How is that allowed?

Given that the government refuses to make public details of the billions in public dollars that they give away in grants, the Wynne Liberals continue to prove that this government is anything but open, anything but transparent. The rules need to change. If they don't want to discuss lobbying, if they don't want to discuss conflict of interest, once again, it begs the question: Why? What is this government attempting to hide?

The Ontario PC proposal for a select committee would include the Chief Electoral Officer as well as the Integrity Commissioner and the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. As part of the special committee, these two legislative officers would provide advice on how to strengthen lobbying and conflict-of-interest guidelines. They should welcome that. They shouldn't fight it; they shouldn't use their majority to block this.

We also believe that nothing this Premier can promise about political finance reform is going to change the fact that how this government has given out contracts and grants should be subject to a full investigation. The fact that the Liberal government brought in new rules to govern Ornge did not stop the OPP from investigating this shady business deal. The fact that the Liberal government brought in new rules for saving emails didn't stop the OPP from investigating the gas plants scandal and the laying of charges against top senior Liberal staffers. If the Premier and her ministers have nothing to hide, they would welcome a public inquiry.

Within the first three days of demandinquiry.ca, 10,000 citizens in Ontario signed the petition. For the sake of restoring the public's trust in the government, the Premier should do the right thing, cut her losses and call an inquiry.

To close, I believe that this opposition day motion is a positive step. I urge Liberal members to support this motion. Integrity is the foundation of the trust with the people of Ontario, and the people of Ontario have lost trust in this government. I urge Liberal members to show the people of Ontario that this government is looking out for their best interests, not the Liberal Party's best interests, not the Liberal Party's political survival. I would plead with Liberal MPPs here today: For the sake of Ontario's democracy, do the right thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's my pleasure to rise and speak very briefly to this oppo day motion. One party should not be able to control an issue of this magnitude. We've been calling on the government for a couple of weeks now to start with a panel. This is a government that has panels to review panels.

Just today, we heard about Equal Pay Day. There was a panel in 2008. No recommendations were acted on. Then we hired another panel to look at the panel. But in a case such as this, where we're talking about democracy across this province, we in fact should have a panel of experts. We should have the people there who can make the right decisions as we move forward.

I heard members in the last few minutes talk about how we want this to be open and transparent; that we want everybody to be part of this process. I can tell you that during the majority government in the last two years that I've been here, I've sat on a lot of committees and I've chaired a lot of committees where both the PCs and the NDP have brought forward great recommendations. In the finance committee—I think it was last week or two weeks ago—there were 11 recommendations to improve the lives of people with disabilities by doing a small tweak which would have had documents formatted in a manner where they could actually use a document reader. The members of that side of the House voted down every one of those recommendations.

So if you think that there's some trust over here that you're going to consult with us on this issue and then we're all going to go to committee and we're going to put

forward some really good amendments that are going to work for the people of this province, well, I don't think there is any trust, because if you can't even vote for issues that would affect a million people in this province, how can we trust, as 50 members of this Legislature, that you're going to really have a look at our amendments and push through any of them?

The government really needs to take a look at this. They need to look at the broader public and they need to think about what democracy really is. I'll leave my words at that because we have other members who want to speak, but I'm glad I've had the opportunity to have my say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I'm so delighted to rise this afternoon to speak to the opposition day motion brought forward by the MPP for Hamilton Centre. At the heart of it is a request for an Ontario advisory panel on political finance reform.

I think it has been said before, but it's worth saying again, that we can all agree—that all three parties agree—on the actions that need to be taken to update Ontario's fundraising rules. We're all in agreement with that. For instance, we all agree that we need to ban corporate and union donations. Here's the interesting thing, Mr. Speaker: I've heard many members of the opposition speak for at least half an hour put together; I did not hear one of them stand up and say they're opposed to reform of third-party advertising rules or including constraining maximum spending limits for election periods. If they were opposed to it, this is a good time to have stood up and said, "These are the proposals that your government is putting forward, and we don't agree." But I did not hear that. Not once did I hear them question or disagree with that proposal.

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Let me give you another example of our proposal: a ban on corporate and union donations. Did I hear the member from Hamilton Centre once say that she's opposed to our proposal on banning corporate and union donations? No. Did I hear the Leader of the Opposition once say he was against it? No.

Let me take another example: reduction of maximum donations to a figure that is in the range of what is permitted federally. Did I hear any opposition? They had their chance to talk about what they don't like in our proposals, but they squandered that opportunity. Or perhaps, they actually like what we are putting forward.

Let me give you another example. We're proposing constraints on loans, loan guarantees to parties and candidates, including leadership candidates. Did I hear a word against this proposal of ours? Not one word. They had the opportunity for the past half an hour to speak up against any of these proposals, but I did not hear a single word that opposes this. I don't understand what their concern is when they keep saying we won't listen to them in committee. I haven't really heard them come up and say, "You know what? We're opposed to this idea and we have a better idea."

Let me give you another example: We are proposing reform of by-election donation rules. If you're opposed to that, speak up now. I look forward to hearing the rest of you speak. I know some of you still have an opportunity. I look forward to hearing any one of you stand up and say the seven key areas of reform that we are proposing that you are opposed to. I want to hear that, because if I hear that, then perhaps we have a conversation to see what your idea is. I haven't heard you guys once, just once, critique the proposal in front of you.

Since the opposition appears to be in agreement with our proposal for reform, the only other thing that they have been able to hang their hat on is the democratic process. That's a really, really curious thing to say, because what they are essentially suggesting is that the current legislative process that we have in Ontario's Legislature is not democratic. Is the NDP saying that the Environmental Bill of Rights that they brought in using the current legislative process when they were in government was not a democratic way of doing things? Is the NDP saying that the Employment Equity Act that they brought in using Ontario's legislative process was not democratic when they were in government? Are the Tories saying that the Community Safety Act that they brought in using this very legislative process was not democratic when they used this process?

It's a very curious thing to say that somehow Ontario's legislative process is not democratic. Might I remind the House that this democratic process has been refined over 149 years? This is not about the democratic process. This is about delaying reform. This is about saying they want reform but delaying reform with only one reason, so they can squeeze in a few more fundraisers, business as usual; so that they can smuggle in Rachel Notley just one more time.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order. Order, please.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Obviously I've touched a nerve. This is not about the democratic process. This is about somehow squeezing in fundraising as usual for a few more months, to somehow smuggle in Rachel Notley just one more time for another \$10,000-a-plate dinner. That's what this is about. This is not about democratic reform at all. This is about grandstanding and paying lip service to the idea that we need reform, and then doing their best through the back door to delay reform. That is a shame.

The other thing that I do want to address is that it's really, really curious that the only criticism that the opposition could come up with about our proposal is that somehow the Premier of Ontario did her homework before she came to a meeting. If that is the only criticism you can come up with—that somebody did their homework before they came to a meeting—that is very disappointing. If anything, they should have expected the Premier to have done her homework, which she did.

What is really disappointing is that it appears that both leaders of the opposition came to the table with no

homework done and no ideas. I haven't heard a single idea from them, so far, that is in any way substantially different from what we are proposing.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say—

Interjection: Where's your napkin? Show us the napkin. Show us your napkin.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I don't know what you guys have against napkins, but I'm just going to leave it at that. Napkins have their uses.

Let me just recap, Mr. Speaker. The opposition has not been able to find any way to substantially criticize the proposal that we have put forward. Second, the whole notion—this idea of the lack of democratic process—isn't about democracy; it is simply about delaying reform.

What's really interesting, and I think what is really annoying for most Ontarians—and Ontarians see through this. If the NDP thinks that Ontarians don't see through their doublespeak, if the NDP thinks that Ontarians don't see through the fact that on the one hand they say, "We want reform," but on the other hand, they're doing everything they can to delay and derail reform, just so that they can continue to fundraise—business as usual.

I want to remind the NDP that, barring something unforeseen, their cousins in Manitoba are going to lose the election today. That should be a cautionary tale to their Ontario cousins, that you cannot fool the public.

If you are serious about reform, then join us, work with us. We have proposed a very robust process. In fact, we've gone through the extra step of saying that we will bring the bill to committee after first reading. We have committed to the fact that we will have a robust consultative process that will include all of the required stakeholders.

All I have to say in summary is, it is a shame that the opposition, on the one hand, goes on saying that we need to reform fundraising, but on the other hand is doing its very best to delay, in their own partisan interests.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say one more thing. The opposition has spoken about fundraising scandals, but the only scandal is the refusal of both opposition parties to say that they will not hold any more private fundraisers. That is the real scandal. That is another example of the fact that while they're paying lip service to the need for fundraising reform, the reality is, they don't want it; they will delay it because they want to do fundraising as usual for as long as they can.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Before I move on, there has been a fair amount of banter going back and forth, to the point where it was getting a little bit loud. So I would offer the member, if she believes and feels that she may have said something unparliamentary—I'll give you the opportunity to withdraw.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the motion, on behalf of my residents of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

We are blessed in this country to enjoy the freedoms and rights we have today. The people who came before us fought to put forth the important principles of free, open and fair elections, and it is my duty to the residents of my riding, our province and our country to ensure that Ontario upholds these basic principles.

I support the principles laid out in this motion, but only a select committee can really look into and fix the problems of this government. The notion that we should leave all the final decisions on how we should structure the rules governing free and fair elections to any one party that holds a majority is completely ludicrous. This is something that we would see in a Third World country, and something that the citizens of Ontario will not tolerate.

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The Premier brags about being the party to put in place third-party advertising rules, but let's be serious. These rules have served the Liberal Party very well and the elections commissioner has been calling for changes after each of the last three elections.

The current third-party spending is not allowed federally or in our other provinces. The Working Families Coalition outspends all three major parties in advertising in Ontario. Speaker, that's just not right. The commissioner reports that it is actually affecting elections. After the 2011 report was issued, the Premier stood and said, "Why would we make any changes? We have the best province in the world." Maybe she's right; we do have the best province in the world. But why would she very clearly signal that she had no intention of changing those rules?

The Premier and the former Premier have ignored the election commissioner's demands for controls. It is only now that they are attacked in media for fundraising irregularities that they are showing any interest in changing them. The Premier has been caught with her hand in the cookie jar. Now, she wants the members here to trust her changes. It has been said that a person's actions are an indicator of their future actions. This should make us very concerned about giving any power to this government to make changes in the legislation that governs future elections.

In fact, people in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry are demanding a public inquiry into the irregularities concerning Liberal fundraising and the granting of public money and public appointments. We need to clear the air as we've heard too many stories of public money being given out to government donors.

This government brags about bringing in legislation to protect government records, only to be the subject of an OPP investigation into the deletion of the same records surrounding the gas plant scandal. They have created an atmosphere of fear in this province when it comes to any agency that steps out of line.

I want to recount a story that I witnessed as the mayor of South Glengarry. I was invited to a small meeting of Liberal-minded farmers and was shocked when the minister scolded the group. The minister pointed at them and said, "You criticized our government's agricultural policy. Don't ever expect anything from our government again." That's the type of fear that this government is providing. You know—

Mr. John Yakabuski: A minister did that?

Mr. Jim McDonell: A minister did that. Not a current minister.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): A point of order. I recognize the Minister—

Hon. Jeff Leal: I hope the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry wasn't implying that it was this minister, and I think he needs to clarify that, because I take that as a real offence.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the minister. I'll turn it back to the member.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Just to clear that up, this was when I was mayor of the township of South Glengarry, so it was not him.

This is not the behaviour that you would expect from a minister of the crown, but unfortunately, it's the behaviour that we see of this government. It may very well explain the damaging policies that rural Ontario has experienced over the years.

We agree with the principles of the motion. In addition, we're asking for the following:

- the creation of a special select committee with equal representation from all parties that will take input across the province;

- limit third-party special interest advertising;

- a complete phase-out of union and corporate donations;

- an end to ministerial fundraising targets; and

- a strengthening of lobbying restrictions.

The people of Ontario expect much more from their government. They've had the opportunity in the past: two private members' bills put forth by our party to limit third-party advertising. This government, both in 2014 and 2015, whipped their party to vote against them. Again, we do not see an interest in fixing a problem. They voted against them, but now they got caught. They got caught red-handed, and they refuse to give the details of billions of dollars of giveaways to corporations.

The people of Ontario need to see the air cleaned. They need to see what has gone on here and to have some confidence that this government has any interest in getting it right. I think if they truly were serious about getting these election rules right, they would not only support this resolution, but move on our recommendations and clear the air when it comes to the scandal around more government money given out for donations.

The people of Ontario have lost confidence in this government; they don't believe they have the integrity to move on this. I know they're promoting that the opposition has the chance to make amendments, but we all

know the truth: When we've tried to make amendments to government bills, they simply get voted down. That's what a majority government does. In Ottawa, when the government moved, it was a minority government, and in a minority government, the opposition does have the parity to put amendments in place.

So let's move ahead on this. Let's do the right thing and let's do the honourable thing, and let's get to the bottom of this problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. It's always a pleasure to stand in the House.

I have to say that I was listening closely, earlier, to the member from Halton, and she went on at great length about the value of the kitchen table. I fully expect there will be a new private member's bill coming in soon on a day of recognition for the value of the kitchen table in Ontario, because—you know, she missed the process. I have great respect for the member, who is a former journalist. But she missed the point. This isn't about scribbling something on a napkin at the kitchen table; this is a process.

If the Premier of Ontario says to the leaders of the other parties, "Come into my office. We're going to consult with you. I want to get your ideas, and then we'll go forward together on a non-partisan process to fix this problem," and instead, the leaders get there and, "Oh, thanks for coming. Listen, sorry to waste your time. I had a couple of free minutes on the weekend, and I scratched something out on a napkin at the kitchen table. This is how I'm going to do it. I'm not going to listen to you. This is my plan"—that is their process.

It doesn't matter where she did it, the process should be open, non-partisan and held up to scrutiny so people across Ontario will buy into it and accept it. That is a plan with integrity, not the plan that's in front of us today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: You know, it has been interesting: Having served on a city council and as mayor, and working in organizations, there is a set of rules that have been in place, and they've changed often over the last several decades in different governments.

I think the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry really explained the misperception of the problem. To suggest that the Ontario Legislature has the rules of a Third World country shows he's someone who hasn't actually ever been and worked in one. We have a democracy that is the envy of the world, with a parliamentary system with checks and balances that are second to none. If you even compare our fundraising rules to those of the United States, we have more severe restrictions, higher accountability, more independent table officers, more regular election laws and less spending per capita on elections. Quite frankly, to the credit of all 107 members of this House, there has never actually been—certainly in my time here or in the decades before—anyone who hasn't followed those rules.

There is great ease in actually knowing where all our donations come from. We all have our standards. I've had one donation, which was an open, public event. I had about 800 people at it; it was at a moderate price. That's the way I do fundraising. I believe that those of us—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I don't have a quota, by the way.

Those of us live in the middle of the law—it's what we have to do as elected officials. Elected officials—like police people—who draft and create laws have to live in the middle of the law; we have to be exemplary in it.

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's interesting, Speaker, that the one party whose deputy leader actually used his constituency office for a federal campaign is lecturing us on morality; do you know what I mean? There is one member who has had trouble with the Integrity Commissioner, and it comes from that party. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

1700

The second point is, it is these spurious character assassinations here. The other thing the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry said is that some nameless person, apparently a minister, said something intimidating to a group of people. I don't know where he has his sources. Maybe this is in the same category as the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, who has non-existent people giving artificial, untrue endorsements of their candidate—another party that, when it comes to truth and fiction, has not a lot to say and should have a humility in the House, given their antics and public transparency. If you're living in Carleton–Mississippi Mills, you must be just totally pleased with that quality of representation, where you feel it's okay and moral to make things up—make people up, make statements up, because the things that come out of your mouth—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Point of order. I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: If that isn't saying indirectly what he cannot say directly about the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, then I don't know what is, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask the minister to withdraw.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Did I use unparliamentary language, Mr. Speaker, or suggest any of that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): No, just—I've asked you to withdraw, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I withdraw whatever the offending comment was, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, to me, that—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He does not get to withdraw and then make a commentary. He just simply withdraws. That's the rules of this House. He knows it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you for bringing that to my attention.

I will now turn it back over to the minister for further debate.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, to meet the standard, I withdraw, period.

Now, those kinds of behaviours are in check, which is why we have an Integrity Commissioner, because there are members—and I just gave you two examples—that behave outside the rules. I don't normally raise these things, except when people get on their high horse—like, their parties and their members are all perfect and the only bad people in the world are the people who are in government.

As far as the confidence of the people of Ontario, it's been expressed, in a number of elections, in this party, in this government, who are trusted to make a whole lot of decisions. It's interesting to me, because there are some very important issues here, like climate change, where we have to trust each other, and there is an object lesson in how you express that. The third party—highly cooperative; highly involved in intelligent discussion; true to their word that they see this as an important issue; behaving in a way to get things done. We are working well because there's some sincerity and there's some trust in the relationship between the members of the third party and the government party on this.

The other party, which claims they want more conversations, is walking out, causing 20-minute breaks two or three times an hour, and completely destroying the process of that committee. What assurance do we have that they wouldn't turn this other important issue into a three-ring circus? Because there are people in this House who do not follow rules, who break rules, who make things up, who use their assets and resources inappropriately—we have rules that we follow.

We are taking an extra step forward. On first reading, we are sending this out—not under some sort of Stalinist, Soviet system, not under a banana republic system, but under the laws and rules of one of the most democratic places in the world, and one of the most properly regulated, fairest and most honest Legislatures in the world, which I am enormously proud to be a member of.

My family came from Ukraine. My grandmother always said that she never had a chance to vote, and she never actually paid taxes because the governments were never there long enough to collect them. There wasn't even a proper judiciary. Many of us come from countries where our parents and grandparents suffered greatly so we could live in this great democracy. There is fair criticism, Mr. Speaker, but let us not demean our Parliament, its process, or members here by open-ended criticisms and suggestions that technical disagreements over how you can make a law better, which we all agree on, is somehow being done because there is some egregious state of corruption or unfairness, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Point of the order: the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Clearly, the minister is not speaking to the NDP motion here today. He's speaking to the committee hearings on Bill 172, which have nothing to do with the debate that is going on before this Legislature today—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. I've been listening carefully, and I know that the minister is doing his best to address it to the bill as well, the comments.

Please continue.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize. I was just being illustrative, in the way the opposition were, of circumstances that may lead one to be concerned about the fair process before committee. I will certainly stick to the bill, Mr. Speaker.

We're going out on first reading because that is an extraordinary event. It is unusual to do that. Then, of course, at second reading, we'll have to go through the whole committee process.

This is a fine debate. I give the third party credit for raising this issue, because they're proposing an alternative way of doing it, which is their job as the opposition. It should challenge the government to properly rationalize and defend the approach that we are taking, which is a different approach, and it is also a non-traditional approach.

Mr. Speaker, some of us, and I am one of them, believe that some of the problem with democracy is that we have seen the diminishment in Canada—if you read the work of Paul Thomas—of the role of members of Parliament as watchdogs and in collective governance, that we are overly partisan, and that the role of ministers to be watchdogs in government has been reduced and transferred to parliamentary officers and agencies.

In my politics, I am a traditional, small-c conservative parliamentarian, and there are colleagues of mine who actually believe—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I listened carefully to each of the things you said, and I wanted to understand your point of view, so maybe you could just give me a couple of minutes and hear the alternative to your perspective before you disagree with it. I am fine with you disagreeing with it.

I read your motion carefully. I've given you credit that it's a good idea. I like the objectives of it. I'm sympathetic to its intent.

In this House, Mr. Speaker, if you actually believe in democracy, you don't shout down members of the House. You don't shout down members of the House. If you want a committee process, then maybe you could take five minutes of your day to listen to what I'm prepared to share with you, because I think your opinions are deserving of being heard. I also think ours are.

Mr. Speaker, here's what I think. I think that one of the challenges, beyond the need to reform finances—and it's at that turn of the wheel. It is that time to do that, and the Premier said that last June, that we had to, in this Parliament, reform fundraising. She said that very clearly. I was in meetings with her. She has had it in speeches. We had planned on doing it this fall, and I think if the Star hadn't gone on what my friend from Sarnia-Lambton pointed out was a bit of a media-driven campaign, we'd probably be having this conversation this fall. But that's life. Media advances it.

So here's my concern. I actually think that the behaviour of this institution—and I think I've conducted myself in that way in the number of private members' bills that I have had rolled up into government legislation, and in some of the work I've done in a non-partisan way with members of that, and I've said that to many of you. I really believe this place is too partisan. I really do. I think it's a huge problem. I think all of us, as MPPs, need to listen and not talk over everyone when they're talking, and actually try to work together. I actually think that a direct consultation by a healthy and representative committee of this House, especially in first reading—I think it's an incredibly positive precedent in the parliamentary tradition of this place that we just don't skip from first to second reading, and we actually use it as a mechanism on those things that are consequential.

I hope all three House leaders are listening to this, because I don't think I'm alone, not only in my party but in other parties, that other members would like to see more opportunities for engagement with the public and parliamentarians directly.

I also have learned, having been a councillor—we used to have these debates at city council. One mayor who was a predecessor of mine said, "Always take your councillors out there; provoke; facilitate other civil society processes. But when people come to talk to government, to make their representations after they've done their work, you want them to talk to a legislative body that has the power to enact and is representative of the Legislature."

1710

So I would argue that a large committee of academics and others is not a good substitute for that civil-society process that will go on and will be provoked as we go through the summer and have this.

I would argue that a parliamentary process covered by the rules, subject to review, subject to over 150 years of tradition around here about how you do business with good checks and balances, is the way to do it. I don't think there are a lot of good substitutes, quite frankly, for that parliamentary process, because it's not the Liberal government, Mr. Speaker; it is the Legislature of Ontario that will own this process. There are constraints on the government, and there are constraints on the opposition. As the owl on the other side says—and the other one, I think, is the eagle—we have a different role to play in those kinds of areas, for the consent that we have to work for, every four years, from the public.

I also have been waiting for a narrative to emerge, Mr. Speaker, from the opposition that's different than what I've heard from them before on what the government has put on the table. I think that if this was a fundamentally difficult, intransigent problem that no one had solved before or on which there was a plethora of different methodologies and approaches, what the third party is suggesting would make some sense—but this isn't. This is a fairly concrete set of options on which there are a really limited number of practices that are generally accepted.

It's really time to get on. I don't think we should delay this. I actually think we need to get this done, and I think a two-stage parliamentary process is the right way to go. We've just done this. You can make the same case that climate change should probably have gone through a whole bunch of committees, because it's much more complex and we have all the more justification to do that.

I want to conclude with one final thing which I just disagree with, and I think it's an important thing that we share. The Leader of the Opposition, who, during this particular period of time, was out there accepting large amounts of money from people in numbered companies and having private meetings—doing all the things that he was accusing the government of, as if there was a separate standard for him, Mr. Speaker—I had some difficulty with that. If you're doing it, you shouldn't be criticizing other people for doing even less than that.

But he made the statement that the Integrity Commissioner, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer should be members of this committee. This is another important disagreement. Those people have to be at arm's length. It would be absurd to have the Environmental Commissioner writing the laws of which he's supposed to be the independent eyes and judgment. These people are going to have to examine and interpret that and represent themselves, if they wish, at committees. But you totally confuse the role of table officers and legislatures if you put the independent officers, the people who police our laws, to make them. We should listen to them, but that distance is the whole reason they're non-partisan officers of the Parliament. If you look at the readings of Paul Thomas and Speakers' rulings before, that separation is critical.

It goes to my final point, which is that there is this diminishment of the parliamentary role. What I'm hearing today that is bothering me more than anything else is that it is our own members who don't seem to understand that not using the parliamentary process for something like this is the final diminishment of our role.

I respect the views of the third party. I congratulate them on bringing forward a creative idea. I hope you understand that the government's commitment to an open and very democratic process, using different conventions, isn't a lesser commitment than yours. It is different one, and we can have a respectful debate about it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from—

Mr. Bill Walker: Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls):—Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: One of your favourites. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak today to Ms. Horwath, the leader of the third party. I want to start off by her opening line:

"Whereas any efforts at major electoral reform must be conducted in a fair, transparent and non-partisan manner in the interest of protecting the democratic process; and

"Whereas Ontario has traditionally used an independent, consensus-based approach overseen by the Chief Electoral Officer as the basis for any legislative changes to the electoral process...."

That says a lot in a short period of time. It's about fundamental trust. It's about integrity. It's about changing our electoral process and that all parties should be involved.

It has been interesting to sit in here. The last two speakers from the Liberals talked a lot about democracy, and yet I find it hard—especially the Minister of the Environment, talking about coming from a country that didn't have those democratic rights and that he actually is condoning special closed-door meetings, that only one party would actually write this legislation. I find it hard to fathom that someone coming from that type of a background would not want to ensure that all three parties—and in fact the Green Party as well, a fourth party—would be in the room to change something as significant as this.

We, the PCs, believe in ensuring the right to freely exercise our vote and that all parties must be involved. The third party has asked for this committee. We went even further, with a select committee and a few other conditions, but we actually are on exactly the same page. Our party has a track record of tabling bills in an effort to strengthen Ontario's election advertising laws. Five years have passed since our party first called on the Liberals to clean up political financing. Our efforts are aligned with concerns voiced by Greg Essensa, the province's Chief Electoral Officer, as far back as 2009. They keep saying, "We've got to rush. We've got to move. We've got to really hurry and get this done." Since 2009, Mr. Essensa has been there. Back in 2011, our esteemed member from Wellington—Halton Hills presented this House with Bill 195, the Banning Collusion in Electoral Advertising Act, and they voted against it. In 2014, you, Mr. Speaker, raised your own bill in this House, Bill 101. Then, I came along in 2015 and brought in Bill 96, the Special Interest Groups Election Advertising Transparency Act, and every single member opposite voted against that.

So it's interesting to hear them talk about, "We want this sudden change. We want to make sure we make a difference. We want to make sure that we"—as long as they are writing it. They got caught, at the end of the day, and people are now questioning—the media are questioning, the public are certainly questioning them. So it's a little bit hard to stand in this House and listen to them talk about democracy, transparency and accountability.

The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care was in earlier, talking about the democratic process, so I'd like to ask her and each member of her caucus, her cabinet, how did they vote against my PMB in October 2015? They voted it down unanimously. They could have already had changes. They could have already invited other members in to make sure that legislation was in place—but no. I think one of the members over there said that the media got involved. Yes, the media got involved because they found someone with their fingers in the cookie jar.

It's clear to me that the Wynne Liberals are afraid of an open and transparent process, or they'd gladly acknowledge—as we have asked for a select committee, and as the third party is now asking for this committee to be struck. The only difference between now and then is, again, they got caught. Shutting down public dialogue, debate or any open consultative process, going against every principle and pledge she made when she ran for office—and I'm talking about the Premier. She said, "I'm going to be different."

Mr. Speaker, being non-transparent, closing down and keeping such a thing as changing donation laws, third-party advertising laws, behind closed doors with one party only involved is not open, transparent or effective government.

I respectfully ask the members opposite to ask themselves: Why wouldn't you want these reforms completed the democratic way? What are your goals if you're not going to allow members of my party and the third party and the Green Party to be at the table? I want to hear what the government has to say. Why won't you allow tripartite committee hearings? Tell us. Stand up and explain why you're not having a public inquiry into past conduct of the Liberal government and the Ontario Liberal Party. What have you got to hide? Tell voters in Ontario why you believe in muzzling, not free speech; why you believe in collusion, not a transparent political process; why you want major electoral reform written on the back of a napkin and decided by one party, your Liberal Party, your self-serving party. It smacks that what you're worried about is actually standing there and ensuring that you get to do it your way, that you get to do it your own self-serving way, not opening up to what we believe.

We're here as democratic representatives of all of our areas of this great province of Ontario, and we need to ensure that we actually have that ability to bring their voice to the table and create a piece of legislation. It's going to have significant repercussions once it's put in place, and it has to be open and fair.

I support the principles laid out in the NDP motion, and would in fact go further and seek a select committee to also review and address the need for reform of lobbying rules and fundraising targets for ministers, which the Premier admitted exist under her leadership and which were brought up by our leader, Patrick Brown. I respectfully encourage the Liberal members to tell their leader that the Ontario PC Party, the NDP and the Green

Party are together in solidarity to demand a process that focuses on the best interests of the people of Ontario, not the Wynne Liberals' political survival.

1720

Democracy is about open, fair and transparent activity and the participation of all. I hope they'll actually do the honourable thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to be able to stand in the House today and be in full support of this motion to create a non-partisan committee.

I've heard talk from the other side about how we don't understand the democratic process. Here's my view of the democratic process: A government wins; a majority government has a right to put forward its agenda. But what it doesn't have a right to do is change the democratic process by itself. That's what it's trying to do here. That's the crux of this issue. It's trying to change the process. It could potentially be trying to skew the game. We've seen so many times that amendments have been downed by this government, amendments that were good in other legislation. I'll give you my one example of an amendment that had to do with the democratic process.

A few months ago, when we were looking at the Electoral Boundaries Act, we put an amendment forward to move the Wahnapiatae First Nation from Timiskaming-Cochrane to Nickel Belt because they could not physically access the riding of Timiskaming-Cochrane. I know very well; it's my riding. Everyone agreed, including the chief, that this had to be done. It was time to do it, and this government chose not to. So why should we have any faith that this government will not, in the end, once again choose to rig the system?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: A pleasure to speak to the motion of the leader of the third party today on election financing reform, which is what the Liberals, after getting caught, have brought—the idea—to the Legislature.

I've heard the various members of the Liberal caucus, including the Minister of the Environment, say that the Premier proposed changes last June. Well, I would like to see, either in the media or in Hansard, where the Premier ever said any such thing. The Premier alluded to third-party advertising—because she was under so much pressure from the Chief Electoral Officer, after his repeatedly saying that something had to be done about that—but I never heard a word uttered by the Premier that said that she was looking to change the way that political parties raised money through donations. But all of a sudden, when the media was on top of them because of high-priced dinners with ministers—ministers who had the power to enact legislation or change rules affecting those stakeholders—the attention started to turn to, “Well, maybe we've got to do something different.”

When the media pointed out that through the last three by-elections—in Sudbury, Simcoe North and Whitby—

Oshawa—during those writ periods, the Liberal Party used those opportunities to raise over \$6 million through political donations, people started to bring their attention: “Wow, something here needs to be changed.”

I want to thank Mike Crawley for doing a little research here at the CBC. He looked up the biggest donors since 2013. Interestingly enough, since 2013—I'll just talk about the top 10—the largest donors in the province of Ontario donated \$1.89 million to the Liberal Party, \$720,000 to the NDP, and \$499,000 to the PC Party of Ontario—the 10 largest donors in the province of Ontario.

And on top of that, the Premier just had her heritage dinner. Reports are that she raised about \$2.5 million to \$3 million at that dinner. Now she comes to the Legislature and says, “No more private dinners. We're not going to do that anymore. The ministers won't have dinners that are strictly set up to get money from their stakeholders.” They've raised \$6 million during three by-elections, \$2 million since 2013, and about \$3 million at their fundraiser. That's \$11 million. All of a sudden, they sanctimoniously say, “Okay, we're going to stop now.” Well, I guess they've got to stop; they can't carry the pack-sack. It's too full. They've got so much money in the last couple of years that they're overloaded with money. Now they're going to change the rules unilaterally.

The Premier went home and all of a sudden got a pain of conscience and said, “I'm going to fix it, and I've got just the thing to do it. I've got a ballpoint pen and a box of Kleenex. Here we go. We're going to write out a new set of rules. I'm going to have a meeting with Patrick Brown and Andrea Horwath, and I'm going to tell them what the new rules are going to be, and then we're going to leave that meeting and say we all agree. Democracy.” Well, I say to the Liberals, that's not the way it works and that's not the way it's going to work.

The NDP have some proposals that they want to be at least discussed and talked about. Our leader, Patrick Brown, has talked about a select committee. He has also talked about a public inquiry to look into, how did they manage to raise all that money from stakeholders over that period of time? It's a fair question. It's a fair question that the people would like to know the answer to.

So when we talk about election financing reform, there's a lot to be discussed. It isn't something where somebody can come to a meeting on a Monday, after having sat at their kitchen table on a Sunday, and say, “I've got all the answers. We'll draft the legislation, and everything will be fine.”

We know, if past history says anything, that if the Liberals unilaterally draft a piece of legislation, it will be designed in such a way that it will be advantageous to the Liberal Party and disadvantageous to the NDP and the PC Party. That's—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —and ultimately, yes, democracy.

Speaking of democracy, this morning we had a bill—I'll just digress a little bit, like the minister did for 15

minutes—before the House, Bill 181, that the Liberals put closure on. They invoked the closure. They put the guillotine down on a bill specifically talking about democracy. So why would we believe that they're going to be any different when it comes to election financing reform? We don't believe that.

We want this to be set up in such a way that all the parties have something to say before the legislation is drafted—and some of the legislative officers who have a lot of experience in handling election financing. Why would we not want to rely on their expertise? Why would we not want to take advantage of some of the experience that they have in helping us draft a piece of legislation that, at the end of the day, will essentially be bulletproof, so that we're not going to be open to all kinds of criticisms that we didn't get it right, that we didn't do enough, or that we aren't representing what is right for democracy and for the people of Ontario, to ensure that politics and government and decisions of government are not for sale to the highest bidder?

That's the problem, at least in appearance, today. When you see this kind of money coming from corporations and unions, as I said—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Speaker, point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): On a point of order, I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the member is suggesting something that is inappropriate and unparliamentary. Suggesting that ministers are being bought and sold or implying it indirectly—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I appreciate the minister bringing it to my attention.

If the member feels that he has said something unparliamentary, then I would ask him to withdraw. Other than that, please continue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. The minister often imagines things, and this is one of those occasions when he has done just that. What I said was that when we live in a system when massive amounts of money can be transferred from unions or corporations to political parties, it is not unusual that the public gets the impression that politics, government and decisions of government could be for sale. That's what I said. That is exactly what the public is concerned about, and that's why we need reform.

I will pass it on to my colleague at this point.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to be able to have the opportunity to have a few words on this opposition day motion that was brought forward by my leader, Andrea Horwath.

Really, when we look at this motion, it's about saving democracy in the province of Ontario. There's no reason why any party should be able to change our democratic process without the consensus of all. That is a great concern that we have here on this side of the House.

We are asking for the Chief Electoral Officer to be able to oversee a committee that will come with good decisions. It's not saying that some of the decisions that the Liberal Party are putting forward won't be good decisions; absolutely, there are going to be decisions that come from all sides of the House but will have a non-partisan view so that we will actually make sure that our democratic process in our province is safe and secure and fair—absolutely fair.

We have a lot of people in the province who are not trusting the Liberal government at this point, and we need to ensure that they can trust in our democratic process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm honoured to rise today and speak in the Legislature to the NDP's opposition day motion on political finance reform.

This, in my opinion, is a very serious issue: the fact that there's a perception that may be out there that there's some sort of pay-for-access game in place in Ontario. It's very disturbing. Whether that actually exists or it's just the perception that does, it undermines the very important work that we do here in the Legislature and it undermines each and every one of us as elected representatives in this Legislature.

I, for one, am glad that some of the former members of the Liberal government in the persons of Duncan and Gerretsen went on the record to decry the relentless push by the current and former leader of the Ontario Liberal Party to fundraise. The numbers are quite astonishing, as my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said. I have an article here from the CBC today that calculates that since January 2015, the Ontario Liberal Party has raised over \$11.3 million. That's \$700,000 a month.

Ladies and gentlemen out there in TV land, if you're watching: Why did people rush to give the Liberal Party of Ontario \$11.3 million? I know they're a great bunch of ladies and gentlemen over there, but I'm sure it wasn't just because of that. People have got to start putting two and two together and come up with five. It begs the question: Why? Why are they doing this? Why are companies across Ontario so eager to donate to them? What are they using these funds for?

There are serious allegations that have been raised in the media, as well as in the Legislature, as to the conduct of this government. The perception is growing that it may have turned a government business into a money-making machine for the Ontario Liberal Party. Whatever's happening, it doesn't pass the smell test, as a number of members have said, both from the third party and from our party.

Something substantive needs to be done to fix what is wrong with this system. Along with my colleagues in the Ontario PC caucus, I support the principles laid out in the NDP motion today. I was pleased to see our leader joining with the leaders of the NDP and the Green Party this morning to call on Premier Wynne to start a legitimate fundraising reform process. We have heard a

lot from the Premier about wanting to work with her colleagues on the opposition benches on this important initiative, but there has been little action to back that up. Why the Premier would want to stand in the way of an open and transparent process to develop these rules surrounding political finance reform is beyond me. The fact that three leaders of three different political stripes have joined together this morning for that press conference illustrates the importance of this issue. Instead, the Premier is pushing a process that will see this financing reform drafted behind closed doors.

Again, as I said, I support the principles of the NDP motion that we are debating this afternoon, including reforming the rules around political party financing, electoral participation and third-party advertising.

Speaking about third-party advertising, I was a victim of third-party advertising in my riding recently. I don't have it in my notes, but my campaign manager reminded me earlier today. He said that we had a number of phone calls to our office in the last election that said, "Who are these third-party people that are saying these things about Bob Bailey in Sarnia-Lambton?" People wanted to know. It was some of this same garbage, this third-party advertising. You all know it took place out there and you all know you're responsible for it, and the sooner we change it, the better.

Anyway, I still won, so I don't care.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: You guys sent a guy down there and he said things about me, and I challenged him. When I saw him down in the dining room one day, I said, "Why didn't you tell me you were coming to Sarnia-Lambton? I would have met with you." You guys know who he is.

Anyway, these principles are a good starting place—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Name names.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'll name him, if you want.

Interjections.

Mr. Robert Bailey: But we're trying to get his support, so I won't say it.

They mirror, to some degree, the six-point plan that our leader and the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound called for, a number of weeks ago. That plan called for an immediate public inquiry into the fundraising practices of the members of the Premier's cabinet, to ensure that everything that happened by all of those members was above board.

I really believe that would be the most important step to regaining the trust of the public, which has been eroded by the revelations around the cabinet ministers' party fundraising goals. Without such an inquiry, there will continue to be a lot of unanswered questions about the past conduct of this government and the Ontario Liberal Party itself.

A perfect example of how the public might question this government's decision-making is the fact that over the past few years, seven renewable energy companies donated over \$255,000 to this government, and in the latest round of renewable procurements, all seven of

those companies were awarded contracts by the Ministry of Energy.

Interjection: What a coincidence.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Is this more than a coincidence? There are many constituents in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton who would like to know.

There's strong opposition in Sarnia-Lambton to further windmill turbine installations there. There's a number of advocates who went out and secured legal representation, at great personal cost, to challenge the future wind projects in Lambton county, and they're at the Supreme Court of Canada. Too bad you couldn't turn some of that money over to them, to help fund that. Maybe that's something you could do. You could send some of that money over to them, to help fund that challenge.

This is an example of why I would like to have seen the NDP include a call for a public inquiry in their motion. It would have been in the best interests of the people in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton and those who are trying to make sense of this government's decision-making.

Our plan also called for the creation of a special select committee, with equal representation from all parties, that would gather public input.

Personally, as I said—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I did write it in here.

Personally, I did have thousands of dollars in third-party spending used and spent against me in the recent election. Constituents continually called my office to find out where this money came from. I'm going to get to the bottom of it before the next election.

A complete phase-out of union and corporate donations would be pleasant to see, with an end to ministerial fundraising targets and strengthening of lobby restrictions.

Again, I want to say that I am pleased to stand here and support the motion that's before the House today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: First of all, I'm quite glad to take time in this debate—and I want to congratulate our leader, Andrea Horwath, and this caucus for putting forward this proposal, because I think it's one that makes a lot of sense.

Let me just say two or three things in regard to this debate.

The first thing is that we need to understand what the government is up to. The government wants the process that it's establishing for a very simple reason: Essentially, they want to make sure they get the outcome that's to their benefit, and an outcome that they themselves will choose what it is.

When it comes to changing the rules and how we deal with issues, such as the rules of the Legislature, election finances and others, you would hope that you'd have a process that is non-partisan, because at the end of the day, we all have to work by the same rules.

What we're proposing is what this Legislature has done for number of years, dating back to the 1970s. It took out of the hands of the politicians, but more importantly, took out of the hands of the government—that's really the question here—the control of how to change the rules when it came to electoral reform and when it came to election finance reform. That's what the Camp commission was all about at the very beginning, and that's what all of the other processes were about, with the exception of the time that Mr. Harris was in office and went back to the bad old days.

But the idea is that if there's a process by which the parties can agree, and a process that is independent, it allows the public to have their say but, more importantly, to end up with a product at the end that everybody can stand behind, that the public can support, that is seen as transparent and, quite frankly, has the confidence of the public. Because at the end of day, if we go through this process that the government is suggesting, which is to send it off to committee at first reading, with the government holding a majority at first reading—in other words, they will control what comes out at first reading. We've seen in committee before, when the opposition has brought forward amendments to legislation, that the government majority essentially blocks those amendments from coming forward.

Why does government decide that it wants to control this by way of the majority at first reading? It's very simple: because they're trying to control the outcome. Once the bill finally comes back to the House and is dealt with at second reading, and—if we take the government at face value—goes out for committee again after second reading, again the government will utilize its majority.

1740

What our leader, Andrea Horwath, is suggesting is that we have a process that has been used in the past that allows those people who are non-partisan and the parties to be at the table as well, to be able to come up with what the suggestions are for the legislation—which would come back in the fall, by September 30—and that we would be in a position to pass a bill before January 2017.

Now, I've heard the government on the other side argue, "Oh, this is just the opposition trying to slow things down so it goes beyond January." No. We were very clear. My leader has said that this panel, if set up, will have to report back to the House, as per the motion, by September 30, and that the legislation then be drafted and put into the House to be passed this fall. We're living up to the government's want to be able to get this legislation done before January 2017. We can live with the timeline; what we can't live with is the process.

Let me just explain why process is important. Do we all remember the constitutional debate? The Constitution is the ultimate document that any country is governed by. The point is that the government of the day under Mr. Trudeau, the Liberal government, decided to patriate a Constitution without all the signatories being in agreement, that being the province of Quebec. We ended up, through that flawed process, some years later, with a

Constitution that is not supported by the province of Quebec, which is a large size of the population of Canada. It would have been far better to have a process by which we could have all agreed—taking a bit of time, in that case—so that in fact everybody signs off and it's over with. Instead, we've had to live under the threat of what may happen or may not happen within the province of Quebec when it comes to the Constitution, because the government decided to have a process by which they wanted to control the outcome.

So we're saying to the government across the way that this is a very important point, when it comes to the point that my leader is making: If you allow the panel to go out this summer to do the work this needs to be done—to look at how to deal with third-party advertising, how to deal with union and corporate donations, how to deal with maximum limits, all of that stuff, and how much you can spend—and then come back based on work that looks at these issues in some detail, which everybody is a part of, there's going to be much more support to go forward with a bill that is then a bill of consensus. If you can get to that, no political party after will change it. But the problem that you're setting up now is that you're doing a process that the governing party is going to control by way of its majority. I predict you're going to try to foist onto the opposition parts a bill that will be difficult to accept, and we may be in a situation in the future where a future government will change it again.

If we all agree something has to be done, let's do it right. Do what my leader, Andrea Horwath, has suggested: Refer this matter to the panel that we've suggested in this motion, allow the panel to do its work and to come back with something we can all agree on—because we kind of all want to get to the same place. The beauty of that is that once we've signed off and we agree that that's what we're going to come back with, there will be unanimity in this House to be able to move with something that will outlast the political parties that were part of structuring that particular piece of legislation.

So I ask the members across the way to reconsider, to support what my leader has put forward. You're going to get things done in the same timeline, but more importantly, you're going to have a bill that, quite frankly, the public will be able to have confidence in, to move forward with finance and electoral reform that everyone can get behind and that the public can have some confidence in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I know I'm coming in towards the tail end of the debate. It's been a thorough discussion today, looking at ways that we can reform how we finance operations here in the province of Ontario.

I think there's a recognition here that this is a very serious issue. We've been operating with fundraising rules now for a couple of decades here in the province of Ontario, and I think there is a consensus being built that we need to look at ways that we can fundamentally reform them. We may differ here. I think the legislative

process is laid out. I think we can accomplish those goals. Certainly, there will be the opportunity for all sides to bring forward expert witnesses in order to ultimately draft a piece of legislation that all sides of this House can be supportive of.

Mr. Speaker, I think one of the big things, as people come in to provide testimony on this piece of legislation when it's introduced—we'll finally be able to lift the veil on some of these numbered companies that make donations in the province of Ontario. For example, who is 2407553? When I look at a numbered company like that, it's a little more secretive than the Panama Papers. I could probably get more information from the Panama Papers than I could through these numbered companies.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Where'd you see that one?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Well, it's right here, I say to my friend the member from St. Catharines.

Then I look at the Barrie Colts junior hockey club—taking donations from young 15- and 16-year-olds trying to forge a future playing hockey.

So through the legislative process, we can call some witnesses and then shine some light on these nefarious numbered companies that are involved in Ontario's political process.

To top it all off, we have the Petroleum Club, which moved from Calgary to Toronto when the very distinguished Premier from Alberta, one Rachel Notley, came to Toronto, at \$10,000 a head—to bring the Petroleum Club from Calgary to the Royal York hotel in Toronto. Eureka—at one time we were opposed to pipelines, and then, all of a sudden, like Saul on the road to Damascus, we're in favour of pipelines now. I'm not a cynic, but moving the Petroleum Club from Calgary to Toronto and having a change in position—I wouldn't suggest there's anything wrong with that, but it just happened.

Mr. Speaker, as we involve the legislative process, all the witnesses will come forward, and we'll get a great piece of legislation that will serve all of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I allowed you to get your last breath; I didn't realize it was a long breath.

Further debate? I recognize the leader of the third party for her right of reply.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I certainly appreciate the discussion that we've had this afternoon, and I think there are a couple of unassailable facts that we need to wrap up this discussion with.

First and foremost, we're having this debate, we're having this discussion because the Liberals broke faith with Ontarians and were caught with their hands in the cookie jar regarding their unseemly fundraising methods, the latest in a string of scandals that the people of Ontario have watched unfold with this Liberal government in power. Frankly, it's another reason for people to lose faith in the methods that this government uses to run the province. It's certainly something that people lose trust in the government over, when they see this kind of behaviour. When they lose trust, they become cynical about what happens here in their Legislature and about what

happens with their government. So it's not surprising that people might be losing faith and losing trust in the way this Liberal government operates.

That's why, when it comes to the changing of our electoral system in terms of election finance reform and participation in our elections, we need to have a truly democratic process—a process that actually engages all Ontarians in a non-partisan way; a process that is truly transparent, truly open, truly democratic. That is the very bottom line that should be adhered to when it comes to this kind of reform. It's not appropriate for one party, the governing party that happens to be in power, to draft legislation on its own. That is the bottom line: to draft it and to control it is not appropriate, Speaker. It is not democratic.

Unfortunately, we have a situation where, in the debate, the Liberal members muddled the waters around what this motion was all about. That's saddening, Speaker. They're relying on things that are not the case, that are not factual, in their argument; for example, the idea or suggestion that we want to delay things. Absolutely not true—very clear in the motion. Some idea that they picked off a tree somewhere that we want some huge committee to be put in place—absolutely not true. It saddens me that they use these kinds of tactics on such an important debate, Speaker, because it is an important debate.

I am disappointed. If we see this Liberal government vote down this motion, I will be severely disappointed, because they will have then chosen a partisan path instead of rising to the occasion and showing the respect and the humility and the fundamental underpinnings of democratic principles, as other Premiers in the past have done. They should be setting a high bar, Speaker, not a low bar. Unfortunately, if they don't support this motion, they will be setting a low bar for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 3. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. It is a 10-minute bell for any recorded vote requested on an opposition day motion.

The division bells rang from 1752 to 1802.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask all members to take their seats, please. Thank you.

Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 3. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Bisson, Gilles
Brown, Patrick

French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne
Gélinas, France
Gretzky, Lisa
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael

Miller, Paul
Natyshak, Taras
Scott, Laurie
Singh, Jagmeet
Smith, Todd
Tabuns, Peter

Campbell, Sarah
Clark, Steve
Coe, Lorne
DiNovo, Cheri
Fedeli, Victor
Fife, Catherine
Forster, Cindy

Hatfield, Percy
Horwath, Andrea
Jones, Sylvia
MacLeod, Lisa
Mantha, Michael
Martow, Gila
Miller, Norm

Taylor, Monique
Thompson, Lisa M.
Vanthof, John
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakubski, John
Yurek, Jeff

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anderson, Granville
Baker, Yvan
Ballard, Chris
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bradley, James J.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dong, Han
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fraser, John
Gravelle, Michael

Hoggarth, Ann
Hoskins, Eric
Hunter, Mitzi
Jaczek, Helena
Kiwala, Sophie
Lalonde, Marie-France
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine

Milczyn, Peter Z.
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Sousa, Charles
Thibeault, Glenn
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 39; the nays are 50.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I beg to inform the House—

Mr. John Yakubski: I want a ranked ballot.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please. I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c)—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would appreciate order from the opposition side. Thank you very much.

A change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Martow assumes ballot item number 38 and Mr. MacLaren assumes ballot item number 45.

Pursuant to standing order—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask that the government side come to order, please.

Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Whitby—Oshawa has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Education.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I will wait for a moment.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): All right. The member for Whitby—Oshawa has given notice of dissatisfaction with an answer to a question given by the Minister of Education. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education may reply for up to five minutes.

I now turn it over to the member from Whitby—Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I asked the Premier earlier today a very specific question about transitional funding for Laurentian University students who are unable to finish and obtain their degrees at Laurentian's Barrie campus.

The Minister of Education, to whom the Premier directed my question, failed to answer specifically, choosing instead to focus on the general higher educational policies of the Liberal government.

This government chooses to use students as political pawns when it's most convenient for them and when it's for their political gain. They should be ashamed. As a matter of history, Laurentian University has made the decision to leave Barrie because of the restrictions being imposed by the Liberal government.

The problem is that this leaves a significant number of students without viable options. Yes, it's true that the university has offered residence accommodation and meal plans to those disaffected students, and some have elected to move to Sudbury to complete their courses of the study. But there are many who have limited capabilities to move from community to community.

The move will force students to uproot their lives. There are single mothers who cannot leave their families, older students who will find it inappropriate to move into student residences, disabled students who have medical support in the Barrie area, or students who have jobs in the Barrie area to support their education at Laurentian.

Furthermore, the Laurentian campus in Barrie acts as a corridor, allowing local residents and students from northern Ontario to study near their families and friends. With this departure, these students won't have the opportunity to receive a post-secondary education close to home.

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As the president of the Laurentian Students' Union said earlier this year, "It shouldn't matter what program you're in; you should be able to finish your degree where you started. Laurentian has an obligation to see us through our four years of education in Barrie."

The mayor of Barrie, Jeff Lehman, said that each student has their own story and that the options don't work for everyone. Each student is unique from all others. But, Mr. Speaker, they also have a common denominator, don't they? They all signed up for a university education at that location, and apparently the deal is now off. So those students do what they have to for assistance. They attend city council meetings and ask for help; they appeal to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities; they stand in solidarity in Barrie with signs to bring attention to their cause. The students affected by this decision did not enrol to obtain an online degree, nor did they enrol in a three-year degree versus a four-year degree. They signed up to participate in the academic rigour that is in-class lectures and learning from professors they respect and admire.

I believe that this government has failed these students, who are left now desperately wondering when and if they'll be able to finish their university education. The Liberal member for Barrie has failed them. The Liberal member for Sudbury has failed them. The Premier and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities should be ashamed of themselves. They're depriving students of the right to finish their degree the way they started it: in Barrie.

So, Mr. Speaker, my question is really quite succinct. When the issues are distilled, at the end of the day, one remains, and it's clearly one of educational funding. I asked the Premier earlier if she and her government would provide transitional funding so that these disaffected students can remain in Barrie and finish their degrees.

I believe that I deserve a proper response to a very direct question. More importantly, I believe that the over 200 students who are so directly impacted deserve a proper response. Speaker, they deserve that response today and now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education has up to five minutes to reply.

Mr. Grant Crack: It's a pleasure to be speaking here before the full House. The member from Whitby-Oshawa asked for a very specific answer, so I'm happy to be able to provide that to him this afternoon.

Our government remains committed to strengthening post-secondary education in Simcoe county. With this shared goal in mind, the province has been working closely with Georgian College, Laurentian University and Lakehead University for a long time on how best to expand access to high-quality degree-level education in Barrie, Orillia and surrounding communities.

Speaker, last summer the government engaged lawyer and former minister John Gerretsen to work with the three post-secondary institutions to develop recommendations for the delivery of degree-level education in Simcoe county. After engaging with many stakeholders—and these are key stakeholders—Mr. Gerretsen's report recommended a fair and balanced path forward for sustainable, high-quality post-secondary education options in Simcoe county. We felt that the

report outlined a positive path forward that would have allowed all three institutions to grow their program offerings in a more collaborative and co-operative context.

We're disappointed that Laurentian decided to cease operations in Barrie, but I want to take this opportunity to correct you on a few of the assumptions that you made about this subject. Firstly, universities in this province are not subject to our demands of where and how they educate their student body. Universities are autonomous institutions that govern themselves, as they should, and will continue to under this government.

On the subject of major capacity expansion and Laurentian being unsuccessful in its bid to create a standalone campus in the region, I want to remind the member opposite in the official opposition of what the former member from Simcoe North said about a Barrie campus: "I don't see any need at all for a satellite campus in Barrie. At this point, I would say we can't afford a second satellite campus, whether it's Laurentian or U of T or whatever it may be." That was from the Orillia Today, July 9, 2014, edition.

With respect to the question of transitional funding, it seems to me that you are under the assumption that this matter can simply be solved by money, when the reality is that this issue is far more complicated and one beyond our scope of governance. The situation is that a body of governance has made a decision to conclude its business in the city of Barrie, a decision which they are within their right to make.

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities does not have the authority to compel a university to remain open. As I mentioned, however, we did work with Laurentian University to try to find a reasonable and fair path forward. At the end of the consultations Mr. Gerretsen carried out over five months, he delivered recommendations for a path forward that included all three schools working more effectively together to better serve students and increase access to undergraduate programming in Simcoe county. It was Laurentian alone that made the decision to exit the area.

President Dominic Giroux—and I know the president well. I've been able to meet with him on a number of occasions. He's a great president and serves the university very well. He's indicated that the president of the Laurentian Students' Union is interested in moving forward on a positive note. And I'm happy to say that of the 700 affected students in Barrie, 500 are able to graduate in Barrie, and of the remaining 200, President Giroux has indicated that 105 will be transferring to Laurentian's Sudbury campus. The remaining 95 first- and second-year students will continue to have the opportunity to work with Laurentian University officials to confirm their individual plan. We are hopeful that a smooth transition will occur for each and every one of them.

The affected students have been presented with a number of transition options, including transferring to the Laurentian University Sudbury campus with residence, meal plan and parking paid for; transferring to another university to finish up the final years of their degree;

completing their degree as a three-year bachelor of arts at the Barrie campus; and receiving a letter of permission from the university to fulfill their degree at another university. We believe that all of these options, along with the ability to discuss an individual plan, will help all affected students complete their studies in a way that best fits their needs.

In addition to these transition options, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has been working with Georgian College and Lakehead University to ensure that students will have expanded access to high-quality, degree-level education in Simcoe county.

The member opposite should rest assured that the ministry did what it could to help Laurentian University

continue to offer courses at its Barrie campus. We are disappointed that they could not find a path forward to continue offering their top-notch education to students in Simcoe county. But the ministry's goal has not changed: Our focus will remain, first and foremost, improving access to high-quality degree options for students in Simcoe county.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank both members.

There being no further debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

The House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1818.

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Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, William Short

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Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
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Wednesday 20 April 2016

Mercredi 20 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 20 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 20 avril 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT (STRENGTHENING RETIREMENT SECURITY FOR ONTARIANS), 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE RÉGIME DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE DE L'ONTARIO (SÉCURISER LA RETRAITE EN ONTARIO)

Mr. Bradley, on behalf of Ms. Hunter, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 186, An Act to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 186, Loi établissant le Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Bradley.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I would like to thank you very much. I will see that this begins to proceed. This is a very significant bill, of course. It's a bill which the government has seen as a centerpiece of the platform that it brought forward and, since that period of time, it has been working diligently to ensure that the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is implemented in the most appropriate way.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that, indeed, the person who is responsible for this, Mitzie Hunter, as we know her as a friend in this House, is very knowledgeable of all the intricacies of this bill and will be revealing those intricacies. I can say, however, that it is something that we placed before the electorate as a government.

I will be sharing my time with Ms. Hunter—

Mr. Steve Clark: A significant amount of time.

Hon. James J. Bradley: —a significant amount of the time with Ms. Hunter.

This was developed, as she will no doubt tell you, after very wide consultation from the beginning and, all along the way, modifications were made according to the input which was received from a variety of sources. So to best describe and expand upon what I consider to be the benefits of this bill to the people of the province of Ontario, I'll yield the floor at the present time to the Associate Minister of Finance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I must comment: The minister's ragging of the puck was excellent. The Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to have the opportunity to rise in the House today to speak about Bill 186, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act (Strengthening Retirement Security for Ontarians), 2016, which I introduced last week. The introduction of this bill marks an important milestone for our government. I want to thank the staff from the Ministry of Finance and, specifically, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Implementation Secretariat for the tremendous work that they have done to make the ORPP a reality.

I also want to thank the expert advisers who have assisted us as we developed this plan, specifically Michael Nobrega, former CEO of OMERS; David Dodge, former governor of the Bank of Canada; members of our technical advisory group on retirement security; and members of our business implementation advisory group.

Bill 186 brings us one step closer to achieving our goal that all eligible Ontarians are part of the ORPP or a comparable plan by 2020. Premier Wynne and this government have shown bold leadership to ensure that the people of this province retire with financial security. When the Premier appointed me Associate Minister of Finance responsible for the ORPP, she gave me a very clear mandate to strengthen retirement security for Ontarians. That's exactly what this legislation will help achieve.

Mr. Speaker, we know that we have a retirement savings problem in this country and in this province. Study after study shows that too many Ontarians are not saving enough for retirement. Two thirds of Ontario's workers do not participate in a workplace pension plan. That's over four million people. The proportion is even higher among young workers aged 25 to 34, where about 75% do not participate in a workplace pension plan. Combine that with longer lifespans, lower personal savings and an average CPP benefit of just over \$6,900 per year, and the result is a growing gap between what Ontarians need to save for a secure retirement and what they will actually have.

Without immediate action, many of today's workers will likely see a drop in their standard of living in retirement. A future generation of seniors retiring with inadequate savings would place pressure on younger workers to support health care and other public services that retirees need. That's not good for people, that's not good for business and that's not good for the economy.

In the face of this pressing retirement savings challenge, our government is moving forward with the On-

tario Retirement Pension Plan. The ORPP will help shrink the retirement savings gap by providing Ontario workers with a predictable stream of income, paid for life. If passed, Bill 186 would enshrine the government's announced key design details for the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan in legislation. This would include details on the requirements for participation and contributions to the ORPP, benefit types, and rules for compliance and enforcement. For example, as we have previously outlined, employers and employees will make equal contributions, ensuring fairness. The ORPP will aim to replace 15% of an individual's pre-retirement earnings, up to \$90,000. Together with CPP, this will create a strong retirement income floor that people can rely on. Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize again that these benefits will be indexed to inflation.

The sustainability of the ORPP is critical to our government. Ontario has some of the strongest public sector pension plans in the world. As we've developed the ORPP, we've leveraged the expertise that these internationally recognized plans offer and modeled the ORPP on the best practices they provide to ensure that the ORPP is among the best-performing plans and is sustainable for generations to come. Accordingly, the bill also includes clear rules related to plan funding to ensure that the ORPP is sustainable.

In designing the ORPP, our government engaged with thousands of Ontarians. Mr. Speaker, last year I led an extensive consultation on key design features of the plan. I travelled to over 10 communities across the province and received over 1,000 written submissions. I heard from Ontarians in rural areas, our northern communities and our biggest cities. Through this process, I spoke with employers, associations, labour groups, pension experts, retirees and individuals and families. What I heard from those meetings was that people are concerned about their ability to save for retirement. They're also concerned about the next generation. They want to know that their children and grandchildren will be able to retire securely.

0910

What I also heard is that they want their government to show leadership on this issue. That's why we're moving forward with this made-in-Ontario plan. We know that the benefits of the ORPP will be far-reaching, both for individuals and for the economy. But we also know that employers and employees need time to prepare. In my consultations, what I heard from businesses is that they need time to plan and certainty. That's exactly what this bill provides. Bill 186 is a critical step in our commitment to provide employers and employees with the clarity they need to prepare for the launch of the ORPP. It also reinforces our commitment to begin enrolling employers in the ORPP in January 2017, with contributions starting January 1, 2018. The ORPP will improve the lives of Ontarians by ensuring that future retirees have the financial security that they deserve.

I'd like to take the opportunity to highlight some of the key features of the legislation. Eligible employees working in Ontario or paid by an Ontario employer

would be required to contribute to the ORPP. Employees would contribute 1.9% of their annual earnings between a minimum threshold of \$3,500 and a maximum earnings threshold of \$90,000, and their employer would match that contribution. This would apply to employees between the ages of 18 and 70 who are not members of a comparable workplace plan.

In designing the ORPP, we heard from many employers about the generous workplace pension plans that they offer their employees. In many cases, these plans are already working well for some employees and employers. That's why we created the concept of a comparable workplace pension plan: so that employers who offer their employees adequate pension coverage can continue to run their registered pension plans and not be required to contribute to the ORPP.

Our government's vision of a comparable workplace pension plan is grounded in the principles of adequacy and targeted coverage. We worked with experts to ensure that our proposed thresholds for comparable plans would deliver pension coverage comparable to the ORPP. We looked at plans that had the lowest probability of individual members outliving their savings.

The ORPP would include other provisions that mirror the CPP. First Nations employers and employees on-reserve would have the option to opt in to the ORPP. At this time, self-employed individuals and federally regulated non-crown employees would not be eligible to participate. However, we have included a provision to allow them to participate in future, depending on the discussions with the federal government.

I'm happy to have the opportunity to discuss the benefits of the ORPP and what it would offer to Ontarians. The ORPP would offer two specific benefits: a pension benefit and a survivor benefit. To ensure that members retain their purchasing power in retirement, benefits would be indexed to inflation. The ORPP pension benefit would target 15% of a member's pre-retirement earnings, up to \$90,000. ORPP benefits would be earned as contributions are made, and the level of benefit would depend on the length of time an individual contributed to the plan and their salary during those years.

The ORPP pension benefit would be available to members when they turn 65. However, adjusted benefits would be available as early as 60 and as late as 70 to provide members the flexibility they need as they approach retirement.

The ORPP survivor benefit would be payable not just to a surviving spouse but also to a member's designated beneficiary or estate if the member was single. This is an important improvement on what is provided by the CPP.

As the ORPP is designed as a pension plan under the Income Tax Act, both employer and employee contributions would be tax deductible.

Last year, our government passed the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Administration Corporation Act, 2015, to create the ORPP Administration Corp. The ORPP AC is the independent, arm's-length entity which will be responsible for administering the pension plan and for

managing the plan's investments for the benefit of plan beneficiaries.

The ORPP is a plan for Ontarians and the sustainability of this plan is a core principle. Our government is committed to ensuring the contributions that Ontarians make to the plan are there for them in retirement. A clear funding policy that would guide the actions of the ORPP Administration Corp. and government in the event of either a funding excess or a shortfall is a critical feature of this legislation.

Through a strong accountability and transparency framework, the board of directors and management team of the ORPP Administration Corp. will be fully accountable to plan members. In turn, the ORPP AC would hold employers to account through a compliance and enforcement framework laid out in this legislation. Compliance and enforcement measures would include education to make sure that employers understand what is required of them.

Let me be clear: ORPP contributions and revenues will not form part of the government's consolidated revenue funds. Instead, these funds would be held in trust by the ORPP Administration Corp. for the benefit of the members of the plan.

I've spoken about some of the details of today's legislation, but I'd also like to talk about the bigger picture and how the ORPP would benefit Ontario's economy as a whole.

The Conference Board of Canada's cost-benefit analysis of the ORPP tabled last December confirms that both the economy and Ontarians would be better off with the ORPP. In the long term, it would be expected to add billions of dollars to the economy while providing a cost-effective means of helping individuals save for retirement.

Today's legislation is another significant step in our journey toward ensuring that by 2020 all eligible Ontario workers would be covered by a comparable workplace plan or the ORPP.

Previous governments in Canada and Ontario have taken courageous steps to build a strong retirement benefit foundation through the Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, the Guaranteed Income Supplement and the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System, or GAINS.

Today, the system needs to be improved for future generations. The province has long been a champion of strengthening the retirement income security system and is pleased that the federal government shares this commitment. Even as we introduce legislation on the ORPP, we are continuing to work collaboratively with the federal government, the provinces and territories to make progress on a CPP enhancement that addresses the needs of future retirees.

But we also know that we need to make progress now to ensure that Ontarians can achieve the retirement security they deserve.

Last week, I was at Studio [Y] in Toronto to announce the introduction of this bill. Studio [Y] is a program to support young innovators. They are smart, diverse, big-thinking problem solvers.

I met one young person who builds robots to help clean up the shorelines in places where humans cannot go.

I met another who has started a social enterprise that supports youth in creating art and music, promoting resilience in their lives and the lives of others.

I met another young innovator whose passion is to advise and support students and youth groups to create real, tangible outcomes.

0920

All of these young people are poised and ready to do amazing things in this world and will have long and impactful careers. They are the leaders of today and tomorrow. They'll be innovating and flourishing in a different kind of economy from the one that their parents and grandparents worked in, one where there are fewer traditional workplace pension plans. It's a world where people are living longer and need their savings to go further in retirement. That's exactly why we are moving forward with this important piece of legislation. It is critical for the future well-being of Ontarians and our economy that we take action now to ensure that future retirees, like the young people I met last week, can achieve financial security in retirement regardless of where their careers take them.

Mr. Speaker, the ORPP is an integral part of our government's economic plan to build Ontario up and to deliver on its number one priority: to grow Ontario's economy and create jobs. Passing the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act (Strengthening Retirement Security for Ontarians), 2016, is an important step in modernizing the retirement income system in our province. I'm asking the members of this assembly to support this very important legislation. Bill 186 will ensure for future generations of retirees and for all working Ontarians that they have the retirement security they need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I appreciate the opportunity to speak for two minutes.

I was quite shocked at the minister bringing up the Conference Board study. She said that Ontario would be better off with the ORPP, according to the Conference Board. Let me give you the details, Speaker, of exactly what the Conference Board said. The cost-benefit analysis from the Conference Board of Canada, commissioned by the Ministry of Finance, admits that it will take 20 years before the economy recovers from the shock of the ORPP. They calculate—this is the Conference Board; the ministry's own study—that job losses will peak at 23,000 in 2023. Real disposable income and consumption spending will remain lower until 2040. This will lead to “a fall in ... private investment that peaks”—the loss peaks—“at \$939 million in 2024.” Finally, when does the report say that the good news the minister said is coming will kick in? Well, that will be 2093, 75 years from now. That's the report.

So when she says that Ontario would be better off with the ORPP, she may be correct if anybody can forecast that far—they can't forecast to the end of the week, let

alone a three-year forecast. They are telling us that 75 years from now Ontario will be better off with the ORPP. So they are obviously not listening to their own experts, their own study from the Conference Board that tells them what a disaster this is.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The Associate Minister of Finance didn't take as much time as I thought she may have used. It would have been nice to hear a really detailed analysis of her bill. This is a bill that has been in the works for quite a while, and people want to know the ins and outs of this bill after the government has, of course, proposed it.

Ontarians are under pressure for retirement funds; we know that. It's a challenge for working people today to actually save for their retirement. I can't remember who previously said—I think it was this minister, perhaps—that the workforce is changing and becoming a contemporary, mobile workforce. That is a fancy phrase describing precarious employment. People are working jobs that are contract jobs or working two part-time jobs, and they don't have the opportunity to save for retirement because they're just living paycheck to paycheck.

An Ontario retirement plan is a good idea, but we really need to make sure that it is going to pay off in the end. Like I said, it would have been helpful if the Associate Minister of Finance had taken up her full hour and really gotten into the crux of this bill. This is the opportunity that we have to debate bills and inform the public and critique. We're here to critique what's there. I look forward to future debate. I hope this government isn't going to call any time allocation on this bill; it has been a history of theirs, and I think that does a disservice to the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: As you know, Speaker, the member from Scarborough–Guildwood, the Associate Minister of Finance, is very passionate about helping working people who, after working their whole life, find that they can't make ends meet because they don't have a pension. That's who is important here. That's why this piece of legislation is very important.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: Will you stop, please? I'm trying to speak to the Speaker.

I want to talk about Etta in my riding, who is 70 years of age. She worked her whole life at a small firm, doing bookkeeping and accounting. She bought a little house. At 70 years of age, this hard-working woman can't make ends meet. She works as a crossing guard to bring in a little bit of money. She also has a little Avon business, trying to make ends meet. About a month ago, she said to me, "Mike, I'm having so much trouble. I'm just wondering, am I still eligible to go to the food bank?" This is disgraceful.

The Conservatives don't care about people like Etta. They care about the big corporations. But the minister—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock.

He's speaking for you. I hear more heckling from the government side than from the opposition side—so maybe a little respect for your own people speaking.

Continue.

Mr. Mike Colle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are hundreds of thousands of Ettas out there who did all the right things. They worked hard, saved hard, bought a little house. This is why this bill is very important. We've got to think of the hard-working Ontarians who need a little bit of money to pay the bills after they've worked their whole life. Right now they don't have that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: The point is, Etta would never be eligible for the ORPP.

The member from Nipissing, in his two-minute rebuttal to the associate minister's remarks on the ORPP, spelled it out very effectively.

We're going to hear for 45 minutes from our critic on the ORPP, the member from York–Simcoe, exactly how damaging the ORPP is actually going to be for the province of Ontario.

I had an opportunity a couple of weeks ago to deliver a speech to my chamber of commerce in Belleville. The chamber of commerce is not supportive at all of the ORPP—as is the Ontario chamber of commerce. During my remarks at the chamber breakfast—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock.

Didn't I just say this? Your own guy is speaking, and you're yelling across the floor at each other—especially the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. That's the second time; one more, you'll get a warning.

Go ahead.

Mr. Todd Smith: During my remarks, I had the opportunity to talk about, how, for every problem or issue that the province is facing, there's a Liberal solution and there's a Conservative solution. The Liberal solution, time and time again, is to create bigger government, more bureaucracy, and that's what we're going to see with the ORPP. The Conservative solution is smaller government, more education for the people and putting more money back in their pockets so they can make their own decisions on how they're going to plan for their own retirement.

The government is ignoring its own experts when they write in their cost-benefit analysis that this is going to have a negative impact on the province of Ontario for years and years to come, costing thousands and thousands of jobs here.

0930

The thing that baffles me about this more than anything is the fact that the Premier stated over and over and over again that if she had a willing partner, if she had a friend in Ottawa, the ORPP would be unnecessary. Well,

she's got her friend with his sunny days in Ottawa, but they're marching ahead with the ORPP anyway, in spite of the fact that they know it's going to cause damage to the province of Ontario and not solve the problems that we're facing in Ontario today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Associate Minister of Finance: two minutes.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, the member from Nipissing, the member from London–Fanshawe and my colleague the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

I believe that the member from Eglinton–Lawrence's story of Etta really underscores the value and importance of a pension—that people having worked a lifetime in this province deserve to retire with dignity and with the security that a pension provides.

We know that CPP alone is not enough. We know that the average in Ontario is \$7,000. That's simply not enough for people to live on. Our plan of building retirement security sets a goal that by 2020, every working Ontarian would either be in a comparable plan or in the ORPP. That will ensure that when people retire, they have the adequate income.

I want to address the member from Nipissing, who talked about the impact on Ontario's economy. Everyone knows that when people retire, if they have adequate income, they will continue to spend into Ontario's economy, and that is good for business, that's good for the individual and that's good for our economy as a whole. If they do not have adequate income, that could slow consumption. If consumption slows, that could put pressure on publicly funded programs at a time when we can least afford it.

Mr. Speaker, this is the responsible thing for us to do: to proceed with our plans of implementing the ORPP. We will, of course, continue to work with our federal partners. We're actually working in collaboration on data sharing, on registering the plan, and we're looking into the administration as well.

But there is one very important line in Bill 186, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2016. It is section 23. It entitles members of the plan to a pension for life. That's why we're moving forward, Mr. Speaker. We have that commitment to Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: It is certainly an opportunity I welcome to be able to take a few minutes and talk about the initiative by the government on an Ontario registered pension plan. In this case, we're looking at Bill 186.

I certainly come to this conversation with some ideas that are going to be of no surprise. I have been critical of the manner in which this has been presented—the target audience, the timelines—but what I want to start with is the fact that my concerns are with what the genuine concerns that Ontarians, Ontario businesses, my caucus and I share about this proposal and its effect on the well-being of the province.

We know, through public discourse, businesses from around the province and even a Ministry of Finance

document, that this proposal is truly a job killer. The ministry document states that over 50,000 jobs in Ontario will be lost, while some industries will never recover. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business forecasts the same negative impacts on our economy if the Ontario pension is installed.

One constant is that no one is saying that the pension plan will help to create jobs. Businesses in this province have been continually assaulted by this government's increased red tape, increased operating costs in both taxes and hydro rates, along with the fear of a new payroll tax. Some of the most vulnerable businesses do not possess the financial cushion to absorb this proposal. Instead, they see a government bent on squeezing more money from them through any means necessary, including a mandatory pension.

Businesses can only pay these when they make a profit. Businesses can only hire more employees and grow if the government allows them to do so. It is no longer a secret that each and every day companies choose to pass Ontario by and find jurisdictions where growth is possible.

We all know that it's impossible to save for retirement if you have no job. This isn't just a message from the opposition bench. Some of the most respected institutions and some of Ontario's largest employers have implored this government to reconsider the proposed new tax. General Motors, Ford, Canadian Tire, Walmart and Magna all worked in concert to formally let the government know the risks this plan creates. By the way, I should just emphasize that this is unprecedented, for industry leaders to come together and at the earliest stages let the government know of the risk this plan creates.

These are associations ranging from mining to hospitality, from manufacturers to farmers, all across the board, whether it be different political stripe or industry. They are all in opposition to the Liberal payroll tax. Between skyrocketing energy rates, a looming carbon tax and your payroll tax, the cost of doing business in Ontario is far too high, and it's costing jobs. Employers in Ontario are telling the government that enough is enough.

With the Ontario government's rejigging of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan to slow down its implementation, we hopefully can take this as a sign that the government is slowly but surely becoming more realistic about its effect on a weak economy. However, the best course for this ill-conceived plan is to stop the whole thing in its place. The ORPP is a tax. The ORPP will apply to anyone without a defined-benefit or a sufficiently rich defined-contribution plan. The premium will be set at 1.9% up to \$90,000 of earnings for employees, matched by a similar amount paid by employers for a grand total of \$3,286 per worker. A benefit equal to 15% of insurable earnings will be paid, up to \$12,815 per year. It begins in 2017 for Ontario's largest corporations, followed by a one-year delayed implementation for medium-sized firms and a two-year delay for small companies.

It seems when the Liberals try their hand at something new, they prove they can't get anything right: green

energy, SAMS—and economics is no exception. Simply, they don't get it; perhaps they never will. The government has often fought fiercely against the idea that the ORPP is a tax, meanwhile disguising it as a way to help people save. I might just add parenthetically that it's a mandatory way of saving. This misses the fundamental point of what a tax is. The definition of tax is "a compulsory contribution to state revenue" or taxes can be defined as an involuntary fee. The key concept in defining a tax is its compulsion, not its use. It doesn't matter if you spend taxes on closing gas-fired power plants or health and education or fighting a war overseas. The only relevant point is that the taxpayer has no choice but to pay; it is mandatory.

For determining if the ORPP is a tax, all that counts is that participation is obligatory. Taxes don't just transfer money from people to government but are the obligatory removal of an individual's freedom to spend that money as they wish. Saying that ORPP contributions are helping Ontarians to save is irrelevant and unproven, since it is quite likely people simply will reduce other saving methods to compensate. If Ontario wants to set up a voluntary pension plan to encourage more saving, that would be a different matter, but the ORPP is compulsory and therefore properly classified as a tax.

0940

The same principle about what a tax is applies to the Ontario health premium, one of the first measures introduced by the Liberal government in 2004, which broke its election promise not to raise taxes. Calling it a premium instead of a tax may make it sound like you're paying for an admission to a select club, but all that matters is its compulsion, as goes for the cap-and-trade pricing system, which is just a tax on carbon emissions. Relabeling taxes might be good public relations, but it is bad classification taxonomy.

Not calling it a tax encourages governments to engage in the fiction of having dedicated levies to fund every type of expenditure, from bridges to roads to debt service, without the burden of a tax. It seems as if the Liberals would like to live in a world where the taxes have been replaced by a slew of contributions, premiums, levies and user fees, every bit as onerous but without the distasteful label of "taxes."

It may come as no surprise that the Liberals are not familiar with the term they know so well, seeing how the Liberal government has introduced so many new ones or raised the rate on others, including the ORPP contributions, the harmonized sales tax, higher personal income tax, the health care levy, a multitude of environmental levies and the routine punishment of beer, tobacco and fuel taxes favoured by cash-strapped governments everywhere. Perhaps not understanding what a tax fundamentally represents and how its mandatory nature supersedes spending intent helps to explain why this administration keeps raising taxes, unaware of how they slow Ontario's economic growth.

Any pension reform should be targeted, not unnecessarily broad-based: a balanced approach. A balanced ap-

proach will be needed to ensure that the ORPP does not undermine any existing plans and disadvantage Ontario workers and investment. The very real risk is that Ontario workers will be worse off if employers with already attractive pension plans find themselves unable to continue those plans if they are required to include the ORPP.

This job-killing payroll tax hinders the ability of the private sector to do what it does best: provide job opportunities for people and strengthen our economy to attract investment. Pension investments must be made with best intentions, toward the highest returns, free of political interference and free to invest anywhere across the world. Pension plans are supposed to be done in the best interest of pensioners and must not be restricted. The ORPP is an idea to achieve a hidden motive at a bad time. Despite what the government studies supposedly say, there's no true need for this mandatory payroll contribution.

This is true for the following reasons. The plan is unneeded for four fifths of workers, who already have sufficient savings for adequate retirement, as shown by Statistics Canada and Mackenzie studies taking into account all forms of savings. Instead, the plan will hurt many families with new taxes as they deal with child-rearing costs and invest in housing equity, which is the most important retirement asset in later life.

There are pockets of individuals who need support, such as low-income seniors facing a poverty rate of 20%. A minority of households with modest family incomes below \$60,000 do need additional support. Any pension reform should be targeted, not unnecessarily broad-based.

The plan unnecessarily extends to many upper-income households, with up to \$180,000 in income when two earners retire. This is well beyond any reasonable notion of what is meant by "middle class," since most upper-income households have the means to ensure a good standard of living.

The plan hurts the middle class, yet many middle-class individuals will bear much higher tax rates on plan benefits, especially in the \$73,000-to-\$90,000 range, as Old Age Security payments are clawed back. I think that needs to be repeated: The plan hurts the middle class. It's not helping the lowest-income earners, and it also means that Old Age Security will be clawed back.

The plan provides a poor return to savings for low-income Canadians, who will be provided little personal income tax relief for contributions yet face a walloping personal tax on benefits with personal taxes and reductions in guaranteed income supplements.

The personal tax treatment of the ORPP is uncertain. If it is treated similarly to other retirement saving plans under the Income Tax Act, the ORPP will provide comparable returns to annuity plans for many middle-income households. If the pension contributions are treated similarly to Canada pension, only a tiny tax credit based on the low-income tax rate is provided as relief, making the ORPP savings a poor investment for many Ontarians.

Although it is argued by the Liberal government that the ORPP will increase savings, it is quite the contrary.

There will be a significant reduction in private savings, as many US and Canadian economic studies have suggested in the past, including a recent one by well-respected economist François Vaillancourt at the Université de Montréal.

Businesses will face a new set of taxes on employees, much of it shifted back in lower wages over time. In the short run, companies facing international competition will face higher costs, along with higher Ontario energy costs, property taxes and new levies to pay for infrastructure. The latter is most critical to achieve growth in the long run, unlike the ORPP.

Ontario had better options that would have avoided many of the above issues. It could have created a voluntary pooled saving plan with automatic enrolment, similar to the Saskatchewan Pension Plan, with a better take-up rate, even with an opt-out feature. Other provinces, like British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec, also offer similar kinds of legislative frameworks for people who would be better off with this kind of a plan.

The Liberals failed at their other option, which was to push for an expansion of the CPP, which makes more sense than the ORPP. Canada pension expansion focused on those households with modest incomes—such as raising the replacement rate of working income to 35%—would perhaps, when this plan fails, be strong enough to deal with a modest expansion that would be acceptable to governments across the country.

Instead of proceeding with the ORPP, it should be killed. It's a major mistake in policy terms.

Much has been raised about the expense to administer. There's no question that there are some parts of the makeup of the ORPP that in fact make it more expensive to administer. When you compare the number of people paying into CPP, that's the entire working community across the country. This one is not. It's not even across the province.

People moving in and out of the province will have to be tracked. Comparable defined-contribution plans will be developed by many businesses, reducing the need for the ORPP and thereby increasing per-unit administrative costs for those in the plan. Taxpayers will be on the hook for shortfalls. Someone must bear the risk with downturns in the economy.

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That goes along with the Liberal government's egregious benefits they offer to party insiders. We already know that very-well-paid individuals—the first CEO of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Administration Corp. earned almost half a million dollars a year for the Pan Am Games. Despite these egregious wages, we are seeing the definition played out of what the government thinks is “arm's-length.”

The appointment of two Liberal insiders who have a track record of exorbitant salaries, cost overruns and close ties to the Liberal government does little to quell fears regarding management and the estimated \$300 million a year in administrative costs surrounding the Premier's new pension scheme.

The question of a funding shortfall: Within section 45 of the legislation, it determines that the ORPP AC has the power to slide the contribution rate of 1.9% up or down 0.2%. Additionally, if the above measure fails to achieve the funding shortfall, the ORPP AC has the power to change the accrual rate. The accrual rate is the rate of interest that is added to the principal of a financial instrument between cash payments of that interest. For example, a six-month bond with interest payable semi-annually will accrue daily interest during the six-month term until it is paid in full on the date it becomes due. If both measures fail, the ORPP AC will return to the government to enact its power in some means to address the funding shortfall, and that means, find more money. This leads me to question if this plan, less equipped than the CPP, will fare so much better. Shortfalls and unfunded liability are a common fear felt today. If history is the best indication of the future, I truly fear that the government's general revenue will be faced with funding the shortfall.

Right now, Canada's economy is growing, but it is weakened by the collapse in commodity prices and a lacklustre global economy. Outside a recession, this is the worst possible time to enact a \$3.5-billion payroll tax.

Ontario, in its economic picture, is the largest sub-national debtor in the entire world—just one alarming distinction. Its debt is \$294 billion, or over \$21,000 per capita. Net debt to GDP is up 48% in the past 10 years, to almost 40%. Last year's interest obligations totalled \$11.4 billion, about the same as the cost of community and social services. I doubt that many Ontarians realize how much they are paying just in interest on the provincial debt. It averages \$840 per person every year, and it's rising. Not surprisingly, Standard & Poor's downgraded Ontario's bond credit from AA- to A+, citing a very high debt burden and a very weak budgetary performance.

The timing of this ill-conceived plan further risks the fragile state of the economy. The ORPP has continually evolved as a revenue tool each and every time it looks to absorb as much money from the economy as possible.

The chamber's latest survey shows that 44% of businesses will cut jobs or freeze hiring because of the ORPP—that's the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, with its ability to check with its members and see how they will be responding. Obviously, cutting jobs or freezing hiring is not a positive. It certainly won't increase the number of people able to take an ORPP.

ORPP administrative costs are expected to range between \$130 and \$200 per member per year. So a worker who contributes \$800 per year will lose up to 25% of their contributions off the top in fees alone. That doesn't sound like a very good return on investment to me. Ontarians won't be saving more; they will just be losing more off their payroll stub.

The Premier has said that the mandatory Ontario plan will be good for the province, yet recent studies show that 90% of small business owners are opposed to the ORPP. An employee making \$45,000 a year would pay just shy of \$800 toward the ORPP, with their employer

contributing an equal amount. While larger businesses may be able to absorb these added costs, smaller businesses will be forced to either reduce the size of their workforce or the hours those employees are able to work. The creation of an Ontario-only pension plan will risk any immediate and future federal government stimulus in Ontario.

I found it very helpful to examine the ORPP's impact on different socio-economic groups. The poor will be squeezed most by a payroll tax as they struggle to make ends meet. Middle-income workers will take home fewer savings for RRSPs and TFSAs, a down payment on a home, mortgage repayment or their children's education. Seniors will never truly draw a meaningful benefit, as we heard earlier from the member for Nipissing. First of all, they don't have a job right now. Secondly, a pension takes about 40 years. As for the well off, it is hardly a public policy concern if some wealthy people are less affluent in retirement, which, in any case, a provincial pension would do precious little to address.

Now let's address the government's core concern. First, I acknowledge a few, like the Broadbent Institute, have come to the conclusion that Canadians are approaching retirement with totally inadequate savings. However, this position seems to be an outlier. The federal Department of Finance notes, "Canadian retirees achieve relatively high levels of income in retirement." That's a quote from the former chief economic analyst for Stats Canada, Philip Cross. He said, "There is no crisis for the current generation of retirees."

The Montreal Economic Institute's Michael Kelly-Gagnon concluded that only a very small proportion of Canadians are ill prepared for retirement. The Fraser Institute points out those expanding public pensions would reduce private savings, disadvantage younger Canadians, impose a significant tax upon the middle class and be less cost-effective than private plans.

The C.D. Howe Institute pointedly wrote that "in making the case for the ORPP the province exaggerates the gap between what Canadians save and what they need to save, almost beyond recognition." Studies after studies by multiple groups have arrived at the same notion. If this isn't to help those without a pension plan, then what are the true motives?

It's important to note that there are two distinct groups of employees: There are those who have some type of pension benefit, which will be put to the government's test of an annual contribution rate of 4% for the employee and employer, respectively, totalling a yearly contribution rate of 8%, and there are those individuals who have no pension with their employer, which then both the employees and employers will be forced to contribute at an annual rate of 1.9%, respectively. This then forces the remaining pension and benefit programs either to increase current pension benefits to employees which meet the government's interpretation—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Never mind waving.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Those with no pension with their employer will now be forced to contribute, both employees and employers, at an annual rate of 1.9%, respectively. This then forces the remaining pension and benefit programs either to increase current pension benefits to employees to meet the government's interpretation of "comparable," which would result in higher costs, salary freezes and layoffs, or—the cheaper and more likely option—collapse their existing plans and roll their employees into the less likely beneficial ORPP. This further makes me wonder why the government would force this on businesses and Ontarians.

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In the last year, the Liberals passed Bill 56, an act to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan advisory corporation, or the ORPP AC, which is to act as the government's neutral third-party administrator of the pension plan. However, from Bill 56, under section 2, duties of the entity, it states: "Investing contributions: The administrative entity shall be responsible for investing the collected contributions for the benefit of the members and other beneficiaries of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan." Who else other than pensioners benefits from their mandatory payroll contributions?

If pensions are created for the benefit of the pensioners, an issue arises when asking who the government considers being the "other beneficiaries." This ambiguity surrounding the wording in the legislation allows for the Liberal government's influence and manipulation of further investments.

Recently, the government released Proposed Amendments to Regulation 909: Eliminating the 30 per cent rule for Pension Investment:

"A. Background.

"In the 2015 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, the province announced its intention to eliminate the '30 per cent pension investment rule.'"

The Liberal government was recently caught in an underhanded move having to have some amendments considered to regulation 909.

The 30% rule is one of the most quantitative limits contained in the federal pension investment rules which Ontario incorporates by reference. This rule in subsection 11(1) of schedule 3 of the federal Pension Benefits Standards Regulations states that "the administrator of a plan shall not, directly or indirectly, invest the moneys of the plan in the securities of a corporation to which are attached more than 30 per cent of the votes that may be cast to elect the directors of the corporation."

The federal pension investment rules currently have exemptions from the 30% rule for certain corporations—real estate, resource and investment corporations—if the stipulated disclosure and undertakings are provided to the regulator. It is proposed that a plan administrator would no longer be prevented from investing in more than 30% of the voting shares of any corporation. A threshold percentage could be established above which certain disclosure requirements or undertakings would apply. Possible requirements that may apply to the plan administrator

and the corporation if the plan invests in more than a threshold percentage of that corporation's voting shares are described below.

Behind all the technical legislative amendments and regulations, in simple terms, the government is trying to change the law to fund their own Ontario-based projects with future tax revenue from the ORPP. This Liberal government will even try to change federal law to cover its tracks to finally face the overwhelming infrastructure deficit, which it will achieve by getting control on all the cash by diverting the new payroll tax to provincial infrastructure projects.

Political interference in pension management is generally shunned because it is a sure way to compromise returns and jeopardize retirement savings. When I think of the Liberal motivations, the word "shameful" comes to mind.

The most important item of note did not come from this legislation. It was a line that was quietly announced in a recent Ontario budget which stated that by "encouraging more Ontarians to save through a proposed new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan," it reads, "new pools of capital would be available for Ontario-based projects such as building roads, bridges and new transit."

With the current legislation, it is up to the discretion and interpretation of the ORPP Administration Corp. to make investments that they consider to be to the benefit of members and other beneficiaries. The above-mentioned ability, in concert with the questionable purpose announced in the budget, draws into question the true motive of this pension plan. It is of great concern that the goal of this program is for the fiscally challenged Ontario government to gather money through a new payroll tax for the purpose of pooling funds for new provincial infrastructure programs.

I'm wondering, since I've come to the end of a particular section, if we might recess at this point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm sorry?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm asking if we could recess at this point because I'm at a particular point in my remarks where I'd like to begin tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay. I guess we could go on for questions and comments because I can't recess the House this early.

Mrs. Julia Munro: If not, then I'll continue.

I want to then elaborate on the point that I was making earlier about the importance of what pensions are for. Pensions are for pensioners. It's very clear when you look at the mandate of the Canada Pension Plan. The CPP and their investment board mandate is set out in legislation. It states that the CPP investment board's objective "is to invest its assets with a view to achieving a maximum rate of return, without undue risk of loss, having regard to the factors that may affect the funding of the CPP and the ability of the CPP to meet its financial obligations on any given business day."

I think it's really important for viewers to appreciate that it's very clear that these are the rules for the CPP. There's not the fuzzy question of the benefit of members

and other beneficiaries, as in the ORPP, as well as the excerpt from the budget document, which then allowed more Ontarians to save through a proposed new Ontario retirement plan. New pools of capital would be available for Ontario-based projects such as building roads, bridges and new transit. I think motive then becomes extremely important in understanding the complexity of this initiative for all Ontarians. It's very clear from the material that I presented this morning that it is not in the best interest of poor people and it is a burden to those in the middle class because it reduces their choices in savings.

One of the other things that is sort of an interesting light in terms of the position taken by the government—when the first bill was being introduced, I and my other caucus members on the committee wanted to introduce an amendment that would raise the minimum entry age from 18 to 19. The Liberals voted that down. Then we tried 20. Then we tried 21.

There was obviously a certain frustration on the other side: "Why are you doing this?"

We said it's because between 18 and 25, many young people are in many different part-time jobs as they are working their way through school, or they're getting new jobs or they're looking for one. They have education debt to pay.

You're taking the money from them when in fact the return on that money will come at age 65. Maybe they don't contribute for more than a couple of years in their youth, and then they either are somewhere where Ontario has no jurisdiction, or they have a different kind of pension set-up—they don't have an ORPP. This hardly seems like a fair way, and it doesn't seem like we're trusting these people with their own money, to make the right decisions. But, no, you are eligible to contribute from age 18 to age 70.

The complexity of this is also illustrated by the number of acts that are affected and the technical responsibility in bringing these. I'll just give you a sense of the breadth of what will happen.

Acts that are affected: the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System Act, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Administration Corporation Act, the Pension Benefits Act—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, the member was kind of hoping that this would end for now, so I think I'll cut it off a couple minutes early for her.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I will recess the House until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1012 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we move into introductions, I do know that there are quite a few to make. I'll be making them from the Speaker's gallery. We do have some special guests there. I know that there

are other guests, so if we could go through introductions as quickly as possible, to give us some time to get to the tribute, it would be appreciated.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome some members from the Ontario Dental Association: Nikki Smith, Dr. Graham Baldwin, Dr. Lisa Bentley, Dr. John Glenny, Dr. Jeremiah Collins, Dr. Homa Jammehdiabadi, Dr. Tom Drake and Dr. Brian Tenaschuk, as well as the photographer from the ODA, Dave Merrow. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have the honour of having a couple of guests here from Timmins. I see Fred Gibbons, who is all the way in from Northern College. Also, Lou Visconti is here with the ODA in regard to the lobbying efforts today.

Hon. James J. Bradley: From the Ontario Dental Association, Dr. Ivan Hrabowsky of St. Catharines: Welcome to the House.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to welcome Mike Longo, John Fase and Scott McIntyre from the Canadian Assistive Devices Association, who I met with earlier this morning and are here today.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to introduce the people that are here for the Kormos tribute who you won't be introducing. So there will be no repeats.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): How do you know?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I've settled that with your office.

We have Mike Haines; Marie Chamberland; Malcolm Allen, the former Niagara Centre MP; Colleen Ionson; Larry Savage; Val Fogarty; Denise Turner; Laurie Orrett; Mark Cherney, Gord Nye, Derrick Smith and John Grimshaw, all from IBEW; Willie Noiles; Claudette Therien; John Prunyn; Susan Prunyn; Melva Snowling; Gillian Snowling; Wayne Nichols; Lisa North; Andy Roy; Bruce Logan; Lisa Kristenson; Lorie Peacock; Peter Scott; Marilyn Bellamy; and Dave Wintle. If I forgot anybody, I'll see you at the event.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I can't resist: You did hit a couple.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to recognize the Canadian Assistive Devices Association here today in the gallery. They provide Ontarians, through our assistive devices program, with the devices they need to have independent lives. Their chairman, Mark Agro, the president of Otto Bock Healthcare Canada and maker of Terry Fox's prosthesis, is seated in the gallery, joined by Hughes Myner, Daniel Mead, Andreas Shultz and Diane Ramos.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I'd like to recognize a few of the advocates for Georgian Bay General Hospital who are here today: Cynthia King, from Beausoleil First Nation, band council health critic; Kathy Willis, the executive director of Huronia Transition Homes; and Dr. Martin McNamara, former chief of staff of Georgian Bay General Hospital.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'd like to welcome Dr. Les Armstrong, who is here with the Ontario Dental Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to welcome Dr. Peter Fendrich from the ODA, a good friend and constituent of mine.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to introduce Dr. John Totton, a dentist from Owen Sound, members of the ODA, doctors from the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors, and Maggie Head, a former staff member for Speaker Steve Peters.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I also want to welcome Dr. Tara O'Brien, who is a naturopathic doctor, and Dr. Roch St-Aubin, who is a dentist from Sudbury. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to introduce three dentists today: Dr. Ian McConnachie, Dr. Vipan Maini and Dr. Kelvin Fung, who are here from the ODA. I'd also like you to give a warm Queen's Park welcome to my naturopath from Oakville, Dr. Nyla Jiwani.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'd like to introduce Dr. Leigh Arseneau, a naturopath doctor from my riding of Whitby—Oshawa. Welcome, Doctor.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to extend a warm welcome to three guests who have joined us today from London West: Nadine Reeves and her daughters Beah Learn and Ella Learn. Welcome.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'd like to welcome Dr. Waji Khan from the Ontario Dental Association to the chamber.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I want to welcome from Strathroy in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex naturopathic doctor David Shih.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to welcome to Queen's Park Larry Savage. The nice thing about Larry is he wrote a book about Peter Kormos called *Socialist Cowboy*. Larry, thanks for doing that. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to introduce a group of grade 10 students from my riding of Davenport from Oakwood Collegiate Institute who are here today with their teacher, Ingrid Montarras. A special shout-out to Eric, who served as my first page. Welcome.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to introduce somebody from my riding who is here today and is the sister-in-law to my next-door neighbour as well. She's a naturopath. Her name is Colleen McQuarrie, and I want to welcome her to the Ontario Legislature today.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to welcome a good friend of mine. Jim Reilly is here in the members' east gallery. He's here for the Peter Kormos tribute today.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm delighted to introduce Dr. Eric Marsden, a naturopathic doctor from Vaughan, and Rupa Salwan, a student at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'd like to introduce Dr. Brock McGregor from the great riding of Chatham—Kent—Essex—he's here on behalf of the naturopathic doctors; he's also a councillor from the municipality of Chatham—Kent—as well as Dr. Art Worth, a good friend who's here on behalf of the Ontario Dental Association.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I would like to also welcome Fred Gibbons, the hard-working president of Northern College—thank you for being here, Fred—and also Dr.

Jerry Smith, past president of the Ontario Dental Association.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to welcome Dr. Dave Jones from the Dorchester area, a dentist in my riding.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'd like to welcome the former member for Kenora–Rainy River, Howard Hampton.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to welcome the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors. Specifically, a warm welcome to John Wellner, the CEO.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased today to welcome my left arm, my EA here at Queen's Park, Norm MacAskill.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to recognize one of our colleagues—it's her birthday—the Minister of Education. Happy birthday.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'd like to welcome Dr. Barbara Weiss from Port Hope. Welcome.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I want to welcome Dr. Brian Tenaschuk from Mississauga with the Ontario Dental Association. Welcome.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'd like to introduce a few folks. First of all, the mother and cousin of page Vanessa Russell are here, Jenn Russell and Stephanie Manikas. Welcome to Queen's Park. Then, one of my constituents here with the Ontario Dental Association: Dr. John Glenny is here as well.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Please welcome to our Legislative Assembly today the parents of page captain Sohan Van de Mosselaer. He's here with his mother, Dr. Mili Roy, and Dr. Gregory Van de Mosselaer, together with school friends Lianna, Luke, Kiara, Ragesh and Maddie. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome all to the Legislative Assembly to support this great young gentleman.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

I do have a few of my own.

In the Speaker's gallery today, we have guests of mine, Sonia DiPetta and Filomena Ferraro, joining me for lunch today. Welcome.

Also, we have a very good friend of mine and a very hard-working doctor in Brant, Dr. Alfred Hauk. Thank you, Doctor, for being here.

We also have with us in the gallery today Mr. Alexandros Ioannidis, the consul general of Greece to Toronto. Welcome.

Finally, would members please join me in welcoming the family and friends of the late Mr. Peter Kormos, MPP for Welland–Thorold during the 34th, 35th and 36th Parliaments, MPP for Niagara Centre during the 37th and 38th Parliaments, and MPP for Welland during the 39th Parliament. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery today: his cousins Yannik and Mario Kormos, and Helen, Robert, Nicholas and Teanna Brown, as well as many, many friends who have come to hear the tributes being paid.

Also in the Speaker's gallery is Mr. David Warner, former Speaker and former MPP for Scarborough—

Ellesmere; Mr. Michael Prue, former MPP for Beaches–East York—

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think we've hit a competition here. We'll see what happens.

We have Mr. Rosario Marchese, former MPP for Fort York and Trinity–Spadina; Ms. Shelley Martel, former MPP for Sudbury East and Nickel Belt; Mr. Drummond White, former MPP for Durham Centre; and Mr. Malcolm Allen, former MP for Welland.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's not done yet. I have one more.

In the members' gallery: Mr. Howard Hampton, former leader of the third party and MPP for Kenora–Rainy River and Rainy River.

Applause.

PETER KORMOS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would now entertain a motion.

On a point of order, the deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to Peter Kormos, a former member for Welland, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader is looking for unanimous consent to pay tribute to Peter Kormos. Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I'm deeply honoured to have been asked by my caucus to reflect upon the memories and impressions of Peter Kormos and the profound impact he had on the lives of people in our community of Niagara and our province and indeed our entire country. To do so in just a few minutes is a challenge, since I think any one of us who served with Peter could take an hour or more to fully capture our own recollections of an individual who was truly, and I say truly, one of a kind.

The size and composition of the gathering at his funeral—and it was a full house, I assure you of that. It included members of the press gallery, people from all walks of life. The size and composition of the gathering at his funeral spoke volumes about the man and the influence he had on all of us, whether it was those in the highest positions in our society or regular folks who had felt an attachment to the man who stood up for them when it seemed that others had forgotten them.

In politics, we recognize that it's often easier to avoid controversial issues that stir raw emotions in the population, and to deal in generalities or to sit on the fence. There was never any room on that fence for Peter Kormos. If there were feathers to be ruffled, Peter was there to ruffle them. He was always prepared to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable; in fact, he took great pleasure in doing so.

It is said that politics is theatre at either its best or its worst, and indeed that is true, and on the political stage, there was none better than our friend Peter Kormos. He could be outrageous, bombastic or shocking, but you also and always felt that, unlike the manufactured rage that we observe on the political stage so often, his anger was genuine and his passion unquestioned, particularly when he was defending the interests of the weak, the down-trodden, the bullied or the disadvantaged.

Peter was prepared to take on the powerful and the privileged no matter what the consequences might be, no matter how unpopular the cause might be. He was unfailing in his support for and defence of working people and the unions who defended their interests. They had no better friend than Peter Kormos, and they rewarded him with their solid electoral support, election after election.

Strikes and picket lines are seldom popular with the general public, and demonstrations are often frowned upon by a large portion of the population. That never stopped Peter from joining his “brothers and sisters” in protest, and they never forgot that gesture on his part.

In the book *Giving Away a Miracle*, in which the authors took an often critical look at the NDP government of the day, they observed, “If some people are loose cannons, Kormos was a runaway multiple warhead.” It was a description that Peter would have worn as a badge of honour.

Some people dedicate their lives to business, a profession, an occupation, family or various personal options; Peter Kormos dedicated his life to politics. His knowledge of and respect for parliamentary procedure and democratic process were second to none. He could speak without notes, without the party script, without prepared talking points on virtually any subject, with eloquence and with authority. His analysis of legislation was thorough and comprehensive, since he was one of the very few legislators who actually read a bill from cover to cover. You might disagree with his approach or his conclusions, but you knew they were based on solid research, vast experience and personal principles.

His knowledge of his constituency and his presence in his local community were legendary, as evidenced by those who are here today from the community and those who, back at home, are watching this particular eulogy. But some of us recognized that his presence in the halls of the Ontario Legislature, often at times when others had left for personal pursuits, was felt profoundly. Peter was the go-to guy for the NDP, the individual who was working when no one else was available. He did the media scrums, the sound bites and the panels when others had gone home because, in many ways, the Legislature and politics were his home.

Peter Kormos, as TVO’s Steve Paikin observed, “saw injustice and wanted to right it.” Our friend Peter saw unfairness and wanted to bring about fairness in our society. He observed inequality and wanted to overcome that inequality. Wherever and whenever Peter Kormos saw a need for government or society to intervene on behalf of the vulnerable, the needy or those without privilege or position, he took on the challenge.

A biography of Peter Kormos, written by Brock University professor Larry Savage—I’m referring to *Socialist Cowboy*, and Larry is in the gallery today observing the proceedings of the Legislature—tells a story of a renegade in politics whose contribution to the public dialogue was unmatched in recent Ontario history. And he did it following his mentor, Mel Swart, who was a beloved individual in the Niagara Peninsula and this Legislature as well.

When the news broke of Peter’s sudden and unexpected death, shock, disbelief and, later, profound sadness permeated the ranks of those with whom he worked, as it did the community at large. Just as when illness struck a few years back, when political friend and adversary alike expressed genuine concern for his well-being, immense sadness greeted the news of his passing. He would have observed people of all political stripes at his funeral to pay tribute to a political icon in our part of the province. Political schedules are often full and unmovable, but you saw at the gathering in his honour so many who wanted to say farewell to a friend—my friend, your friend, our friend, Peter Kormos.

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At the cabinet meeting after the news of his passing emerged, the conversations turned, as we filed from the cabinet room, to Peter Kormos and our final chance to say goodbye to a beloved colleague, and a wish from Premier Wynne that all of us could join her in making our way to the memorial service in Peter’s honour in Thorold.

It is said at virtually every funeral service that the deceased person will be missed. Indeed, this is always true for family and close friends. Peter is truly missed. There’s no replacement for a person of his character. He cannot be cloned. His is a pattern that cannot be duplicated. Peter Kormos may be gone from us in the mortal sense, but his memory will live on in the hearts and minds of those of us who had the privilege of serving with him in this House, and in all who encountered him in their daily lives.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute?

Mr. Jim Wilson: On behalf of our leader and our PC caucus, I’m delighted to pay tribute today to a man who was a true blue-collar hero to Welland and Thorold, and quite frankly a legendary figure in this assembly, known for his wit, style and, above all, his blunt integrity.

Peter Kormos’s star burned bright. He earned the respect and admiration of everyone who had the good fortune to know him, including people like me who are in different political parties. Most importantly, he earned the respect and admiration of the average person he represented as a lawyer or as an elected official. His constituents knew that he would fight for them without hesitation or reservation. There can be no higher compliment given than that earned respect.

While Peter was flamboyant and always stood out in a crowd, he never forgot his roots and had no patience for what he termed “horsefeathers.” Peter didn’t use the term “horsefeathers” because he was being polite; as someone

well-versed in parliamentary procedures and rules, he knew he could be kicked out for using unparliamentary language. Peter being who he was, he just couldn't resist pushing the envelope, so he found clever euphemisms and turns of phrase to torment every Speaker. Everyone clearly knew what Peter was saying, but no Speaker could reference existing rulings or make new ones up fast enough to tie up Peter's cutting tongue.

Peter entered the provincial Legislature in 1988, two years before I also began my role as an MPP. One of the reasons I credit for my own longevity in this job is that I was fortunate not to ever find myself in Peter's cross-hairs.

This was a man who wasn't afraid to fire shots at absolutely anyone and everyone. When insurance company executives appeared at a legislative committee during the Peterson government's time in office—they were introducing legislation that would increase insurance rates—Peter earned a reprimand from his own party leader for calling them “whores” and “slime.” Yes, Mr. Speaker, there was a time when reading Hansard topped any reality show for shock and entertainment value.

Peter was single-handedly responsible for the highest viewership of the Legislative Assembly television channel. In protest of Premier Peterson's insurance legislation, he filibustered for 37 hours, at one time speaking for 17 hours non-stop. Thousands of Ontario residents tuned in to watch this marathon feat. He had set up telephone lines to take in viewers' concerns and comments, which he used to keep on talking. More than 500 people called into those lines, one of which was even staffed by then-NDP leader Bob Rae. Mischievously, Peter also provided colouring books for government Liberal MPPs during the middle of the night, when he saw they were getting a bit restless. I can't even imagine how much fun Peter could be having if he were still in the Legislature today.

It was such a delight for me to see Peter in action in this Legislature. He had such an intellect, and he would mesmerize everyone just about every time he stood up to speak. It was in Peter's nature to deflate arrogance, inflict discomfort on the comfortable and comfort those in need or in trouble.

Even at an early age, Mr. Speaker, there is a track record of challenging authority without reservation and often with humour. He was never afraid to get into a bit of trouble and would pay the price without complaint. As a practising lawyer, he used to regularly park in the judge's reserved parking spot, often getting his sports car towed away. He obviously thought the sight of the judge having to fish out coins for a parking meter was worth the cost of the tow.

As both an alderman and local lawyer before he entered provincial politics, Peter was well known for being scrappy and combative. Just before winning his first provincial election, he was cited for contempt of court on the grounds that he was insolent and grand-standing. I understand the citation was dropped just days before voting day. Personally, I suspect that everyone at

court just wanted him to go to Queen's Park so he wouldn't be in their faces on a daily basis. In fact, there is a rumour that the lawyers whose arguments he would rip apart in court actually took up a collection to ensure his campaign had enough money for him to succeed to his election to Queen's Park.

Peter never forgot his roots and remained a maverick even when he was in the government caucus under Bob Rae. In the early days of the Rae government, there was a ridiculous amount of controversy over a photo that was taken of Peter. He appeared as the Sunshine Boy in the *Toronto Sun*. He was fully and conservatively dressed, wearing a white shirt, dark pants and a tie. In fact, he was probably more dressed up than was his usual habit here in the Ontario Legislature of cowboy boots and no tie. For some reason, this photo generated more anguish in the government at the time than any of the shenanigans of the day. Cabinet colleagues of Peter were critical, and Bob Rae ultimately removed him from cabinet. Different times indeed, Mr. Speaker.

Personally, I was just jealous of Peter. No newspaper has ever asked me to pose for a glamour shot.

Laughter.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Don't get too excited over there.

He will always be fondly remembered and greatly missed. Many of the newer MPPs in this assembly never had the privilege of seeing Peter in action. There have been few MPPs like Peter, that could command the attention of everyone each time he rose to speak. He had relentless drive and energy, never mincing words. Peter never hesitated to call “horsefeathers” in this assembly and express himself fully.

When I think of Peter, I often remember how he would take every opportunity to reprimand the government for limiting debate through time allocation and closure motions. I know many of us fondly remember him yelling his famous line on these occasions: “The Liberals don't want to work.”

I know he would be saying that regularly if he was still with us today, so as in every debate that Peter participated in, once again, today, Peter gets the final word.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It is certainly a privilege to rise on behalf of New Democrats to pay tribute to our colleague, a mentor, and our friend, Peter Kormos.

To his family who is here with us this morning from Welland and Niagara and, I understand, as far away as Slovakia, Peter was a brother, a nephew, a cousin. But in this House, Peter is a giant who earned respect and admiration across the aisles, as we've heard this morning, Speaker.

In our party, he's an icon. To the people of Welland and Thorold, the people he served here incredibly well for 23 years, Peter Kormos was a friend and a familiar face they could count on to always put the concerns of hard-working people first.

As was said, for newer members of this House who have only been here since 2011, I should say that no speech confined to using parliamentary language will

ever quite do justice to Peter Kormos. This is a man who knew the standing orders better than anyone, but also knew how to swear like a sailor and liked nothing better than skating close to those lines, which is why, if you look up Hansard, you can see Peter's erudite articulation of the philosophical difference between lying, which, of course, is an unparliamentary accusation, and, on the other hand, bullspitting, which Peter reasoned is a perfectly parliamentary term to describe what too many politicians try to do.

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Nothing was going to stop Peter Kormos from telling it like it was, Speaker. He brought politics down to earth and he made sure that people back home could actually hear their voices in this Legislature. It was that commitment to the people of Welland that he wore on his sleeve, the sleeves of buttoned-down shirts that were made in Canada by unionized workers who he knew were treated fairly and paid decent wages, shirts that were laundered and pressed at Lee-Wah Laundry and that he had probably picked up at Blake's menswear, because Peter knew that those local businesses and hard-working families are exactly what make our community strong. He knew that he worked for them.

And as was said, he worked around the clock. If that meant filibustering for 17 hours when the government tried to shut down debate, Peter would do that.

If it meant going undercover at the Family Responsibility Office, Peter would do that too. And if it meant borrowing Michael Prue's union-made tuxedo and wearing it in this House, Peter would do that just to prove his point that New Democrats can never be bullied or shamed out of doing our jobs. Because of those memorable tactics, Speaker, he was reminding us that politics is about one thing: It's about making a difference in people's lives, and he was going to do that one way or another.

Even if it meant challenging people's assumptions, Peter was going to do the right thing, like when he fought for presumed consent for organ donation to help save the lives of people stuck waiting for transplants. To paraphrase Peter, it's not so much an extraordinary act to donate an organ; the extraordinary act is to not donate an organ when people's lives hang in the balance. That's who Peter was.

No problem was too big or too daunting to take on. When the rights of thousands of Torontonians were violated during the G20 summit, Peter stood up for the civil rights of those peaceful protestors and bystanders. He stood up for people who had been all too literally trampled on, and he stood up for people whose rights were being ignored. Whenever workers were locked out or when they were forced to the picket line to protect their rights, whether it was a factory in the smallest town or the tallest tower on Bay Street, Peter was there, letting those workers know that they were not alone.

Voilà qui était Peter. Voilà le genre de gars qu'il était.

He stuck to his principles, even if it meant taking on his own government or his own party. I can tell you, as I

said at his funeral, that Peter could be a real pain in the—you know where I'm going with that, Speaker—a real pain in the posterior, shall we say. But because of those principles and because he never forgot who he was working for, Peter has left a tremendous legacy to this House and to this province.

For New Democrats, he summed it up best when he spoke about the work that we try to do each and every day. Here's what he said on December 18, 2003, while standing just a few feet from where I am standing right now. He said, "New Democrats are going to work provincially, New Democrats are going to work federally, to fight for those people who need fighting for, to speak for those people who need speaking for, to stand up for those people who need help standing up for themselves and to stand up for those people who have been dumped on, trashed on, shoved aside, marginalized, beaten up on, whacked, for far too long." No one could have put it better, Speaker.

Peter knew perfectly well that, even once he was gone, his work would continue, because the people of Ontario still need voices that speak up and people who stand up and aren't afraid to call "bullshit," or step up close to the line of what's allowed.

Speaker, we have our caucus members today wearing their shirt sleeves in honour of Peter's favourite uniform here in the Legislature. It's funny to recall that this irked so much one of the high-standing members of the Liberal caucus at one point in time that she actually was going to try to bring a dress code into Queen's Park because it so irked her that Peter wore his shirt sleeves every day. So thank you, members of the NDP caucus who are in their shirt sleeves today. It's quite a funny recollection.

One of the things that's true is that Peter had a voracious appetite for knowledge and information. In fact, when I first became leader, he was sitting beside me as my House leader. I would notice every day that he would have the dictionary. I would say, "Why do you have the dictionary, Peter? I'm sure you don't have to look up the meanings of words. You pretty much know everything about everything." He said, "Well, Ms. Horwath, I choose one word every day that I don't know and I use that word for the rest of the day until I know that word and know what it means." That's how Peter was expanding his vocabulary day in and day out.

It's interesting, because we know that Peter was a voracious consumer of information and knowledge. He was always reading articles, newspapers, various books of precedents and literature. It was quite astounding how much information and knowledge he could take in, anything that his insatiable mind could get a hold of. In fact, the remnants of his intellectual consumption literally littered his office, his home, his apartment and even his car, if people had the opportunity to see the places where Peter consumed information.

In fact, when I first was elected, Peter offered to drive me home after those night sittings that we used to have back in the day. I said, "Sure, that's great. Thanks for the offer." He had a little truck at the time. We were parked

under the archways on the east side of the building. I went to get into his car. I opened the door, and I literally ended up with my knees at my chin because there were stacks of articles and paperwork that were on the floor of his truck on the passenger side. That's what it was like with Peter: two-foot-tall stacks of paper everywhere you went.

Speaker, if Peter had known how much pleasure his memory would give us, how many times we'd find ourselves chuckling at his antics or cursing the thought of what he managed to get away with or finding ourselves inspired by his wit and his wonderful mind, I have no doubt that he would have flashed that Peter Kormos grin and then he would have told us all, in no uncertain terms, to get back to work, which is a turn on the phrase that was used by the member of the official opposition in his tribute, which is "Liberals don't want to work." Right?

Peter, we'll miss you like crazy. We want to thank you here in this House for the 23 years of dedicated service that you gave to the people of Ontario. I want to end by actually inviting people here in the Legislature, on all sides of the House, and all guests to come and spend some more time remembering Peter at Hart House, after question period, in the east common room.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to thank all members for their thoughtful and heartfelt comments on this tribute day.

If you'll forgive me, I will just offer that I, too, have fond memories of Peter. I was the recipient of some of his mentoring and tutoring. I took it with the grace that it was intended, because there were times where he took me aside after the fact and basically said, "Now, here's what you learned." So I thought I would share that with you.

Also, to all of the members who have made comment about his language: I was not Speaker during that time, so, from the grave, Peter, you're out of order.

To the family and friends, in our tributes, we always provide a DVD for the family and a copy of Hansard.

Again, for all of the family members and on behalf of all Ontarians, thank you for the gift of Peter.

ORAL QUESTIONS

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. As Adrian Morrow from the Globe and Mail pointed out yesterday, the Ontario Liberal Party has received at least \$400,000 from companies that received grants from the Liberal government. That's only from the companies that we know about.

This certainly raises some questions that demand answers. Will the Premier commit today to ending all fundraising targets for her cabinet: yes or no?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question from the Leader of the Opposition. He

knows full well that we are going to be moving to change the rules around political donations. I have said many times that it would be great to have his input on the direction that he thinks we should be going. I've been very clear that as we draft legislation we would like to have the input of both the opposition leaders, so that when we bring that legislation forward and before it goes out for consultation after first reading—which Peter Kormos would remind us is unusual, Mr. Speaker, because usually legislation goes out after second reading—we would have the opportunity and the benefit of their input.

The Leader of the Opposition led his question with a commentary about companies that have donated to the Liberal Party. Many of those companies donated to all three parties, and the Leader of the Opposition knows that full well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: There are numerous companies that receive grants from this government and also donate to the Liberal Party—disproportionately so. The donations come both before and after companies receive grants from the Liberal government. It gives the appearance that the Liberal government has been operating a pay-to-play scheme.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain why it's so difficult to provide the people of Ontario with a list of the companies that you have given tax dollars to? If you have nothing to hide, provide the list and highlight all the contracts, grants and donations that have been made.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reality is that we make announcements about those grants. They are public announcements, Mr. Speaker, and I will just say that the members of the opposition party show up to those announcements, because they know that jobs with Cisco and Ford and Linamar and Toyota—all companies that have given to all parties—they know that the jobs that are created in their communities because of the vast investments that those companies are making in Ontario are good for their constituents, just as they're good for the Ontario economy.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Before I turn to the leader, I'm going to remind you that it's difficult for me to get control if, while answering, members of that side continue to heckle. And having the heckling from that side is not helpful either. Let's have this discussion, please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: The Premier says she makes public all the grants they announce. That, Mr. Speaker, is not accurate. If you look at the Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment grant of \$500,000, shortly thereafter a \$30,000 donation to the Liberal Party. There was no announcement. There was no press release. So my challenge is, will you release all the grants, all the contracts the government has done? It is the right thing to do. If you have nothing to hide, you should do that.

It speaks to the problem that the Auditor General has raised: \$1.45 billion in grants and interest-free loans. The Auditor General said there was no ability to track the

economic success of the grants. So if it's not about jobs, if it's not about economic success, as the Auditor General has outlined, what is it about? Is it about fundraising? Is it about supporting the Liberal Party?

Do the right thing: Welcome a public inquiry. Be transparent, like you promised.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What the Leader of the Opposition's question is about is innuendo. The Auditor General in her recent report said that funding decisions for business supports are made independently. Political donations do not determine policy in this government. I've said that clearly. That remains to be the case.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Some 80% were invited to apply.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

The member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're next, if you try it.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, any suggestion that political donations buy policy decisions is completely, completely false. That's why we've committed to a rational, depoliticized process. The reality is that there are—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not going to allow it to happen.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There are companies that have received grants from the province because they have made huge investments. They have created jobs. The Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the third party—their parties have benefited from donations from those same companies. I hope we're now going to work together to change the rules—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

If I'm going to get tested, you'll fail.

New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Since the Premier doesn't want to talk about Adrian Morrow's column on the Liberal donation scandal, let's talk about another column. This one was written on the weekend by Dr. Nadia Alam.

It reads that in Toronto alone, "The steep price of the government's actions in the past six months" has cost the health care system "a family doctor, an ophthalmologist, an orthopedic surgeon," a blood-testing clinic, "and two addiction clinics...." That affected over 60,000 patients.

The government benches want to laugh about that. They want to laugh about the health care cuts. I was shocked that they released radio ads—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I can't do the other side if you continue to interrupt. It stops.

Finish, please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, the government may laugh about these cuts, and now they want to do vanity ads, radio ads, saying what a great job they're doing on health care. Maybe instead of running radio ads around the province, saying why you're doing a great job in health care, put that money into patients.

My question to the Premier is, will you start supporting Ontario's patients? Will you stop—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport will come to order.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, there's a billion more dollars going into health care this year as a result of this budget. There's \$345 million going into hospitals.

The reality is that there are changes in health care that are happening around the province, but there are not funding cuts. A billion dollars more is going into health care as a result of the budget that we just put in place.

But the reality is that people want more care in their communities. People want to make sure they are getting care from centres of excellence. We want to make sure that people get the health care they need, when they need it, and where they need it.

I make no apologies for the fact that the health care system is undergoing a transformation. That is necessary. Our demographics are changing. We must make those changes. The Leader of the Opposition thinks that we can remain static. He does not understand the nature of the population in this province. We need to make changes, and we continue to increase funding.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier: The Premier says she's investing in health care. The gall, that she can make that assertion—but then again, the finance minister said yesterday that hydro bills are going down.

So let's speak about the facts. Let's look at a few cities around Ontario. St. Joseph's hospital in London: \$8.5 million cut, 60 staff positions lost. The wait time at St. Joe's ER is already one of the longest in Ontario, and it will be worse now, because of the Liberals.

The people in Welland are worried about their hospital, and it could be on the chopping block any day.

St. Joe's hospital in Hamilton lost 136 jobs just months ago because of this government, yet the Premier says she's investing in health care. Every hospital is being forced to cut staff, being forced to cut critical services.

The only thing this government is investing in is more vanity ads. Stop spending health care money on radio ads. Spend it to support Ontario's patients. Do the right thing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

I'm sorry. That was your first supplementary. There is a final supplementary coming.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, only the PC Party could describe a billion dollars more invested in our health care system as "a cut."

Only the PC Party that promised to fire 100,000 Ontario employees, including thousands of health care workers, could describe what we're doing as anything but a further investment in our health care system.

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We're investing \$10 billion in new capital infrastructure for our hospitals. We're doing the opposite of what that member did when he was part of the government in Ottawa: when he allowed the health accord to collapse and lapse; when he closed the Health Council of Canada; when he voted for a budget that axed the Canada Interim Federal Health Program for refugees—he was part of that government in Ottawa. So it's rich to hear from this party this newfound interest in investing in health care.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier. The health minister likes to say they're investing more in health care. Yet the health minister can't find a single physician or nurse in the province who will say this government isn't cutting health care. Let me talk about another example close to home in my riding of Simcoe North.

At Georgian Bay General Hospital, they're closing the obstetrics unit, cutting beds, reducing services in the ICU, cutting seven acute care beds, shipping out pediatric surgery. It seems like all the health care advertisement they're doing isn't about supporting patients at Georgian Bay general.

Mr. Speaker, will this government promise today, promise the people of Simcoe North, promise those in Midland, Penetanguishene, Tiny township, Tay township, Beausoleil First Nation—will you do the right thing? Will you not gut the health care services at Georgian Bay general? Will you promise not to pursue this \$5-million cut? Will you do the right thing? We can't—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I've been warned for less. Let's hear it: Will the Premier get warned for that kind of outburst?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Start the clock.

I find it disappointing that if I don't hear everything that's going on in this place, the accusations fly about my neutrality. I'm insulted by that, to be honest. Regardless of how one sees it, I will try to call it as I see it and hear it. I hold it to you to be those people—not to me. If anyone says anything in this House, they have a right to stand and withdraw on their own.

Minister.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope I won't have to withdraw in a moment, but I am so absolutely disgusted at what the member opposite just said. When he's fearmongering about Georgian Bay General Hospital, talking about an obstetrics unit which is slated to close—which is absolutely false; there is no plan whatsoever, and he knows that. The board has not approved it. The LHIN has not approved it. The ministry has not approved it.

But, Mr. Speaker, he is part of a government that, for the last 10 years, turned their backs on our First Nations in this country and turned their backs on Ontario in letting the health accord lapse. He's part of a party provincially that fired 6,000 nurses and that closed 10,000 hospital beds, and he's got the nerve to stand up and speak things which frankly aren't true.

I hope he has another supplementary or another question about Georgian Bay, because I know there are people in the gallery who deserve a truthful response from him.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

I would ask that we measure what we say in this House. Some things being said are not what I would call a race to the top.

New question.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Can the Premier explain why she's the only political leader in Ontario fighting against a non-partisan, open and transparent process to reform election laws in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'm the only political leader in Ontario who wants to move quickly and expeditiously, have a full consultation on political donations, acknowledging that there's a fair degree of consensus on the direction that we need to go, and is putting forward a proposal that will bring us to a place where we will have a change in rules, after a full consultation, by the beginning of January 2017.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier created a scandal when she designed a system where the Liberal Party appeared to be selling access to cabinet ministers. Yesterday, Liberals voted against a non-partisan, open and

transparent process that would ensure our democratic reforms are fair to all Ontarians, no matter who they are or how deep their pockets are, Speaker. Can the Premier tell Ontarians why she's putting the interests of the Liberal Party ahead of the interests of Ontarians?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, what I have said is that it would be great if we had some input from the leaders of the opposition parties on the substance of these reforms, because there has been already a fair bit of public discussion about this. There are other jurisdictions that have made changes, and we can look to those other jurisdictions.

So I'd ask the leader of the third party, does she agree that we should reform third-party advertising rules? Does she agree that we should constrain the maximum spending limits for election period? What does she think about between-election periods? Does she believe that we should put a ban on corporate and union donations? Does she believe there should be a public subsidy? Should it be a transitional subsidy? What should be the level of that subsidy? Does she believe that there should be a reduction of maximum donations to a figure that is in the range of what's permitted federally?

These are all proposals that I have put forward and that I asked the leaders of the opposition parties to weigh in on, as we draft legislation. There has been no substance that has come from them. I'd be very interested in her thoughts on any of these subjects.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock.

Just a quick comment: The member got dangerously close to impugning motive, so I want to just remind her that I am listening carefully to all of the conversations about that particular issue that I said would be happening during this particular timeframe. So just a gentle reminder, please.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier has claimed that there's a consensus behind her plan—a plan that no one has seen—and she can't point to a single meeting that she has had with Ontarians, experts or civil society. However, there is a public consensus, Speaker, for a transparent and non-partisan process. It's a plan supported by New Democrats, Conservatives and the Green Party. Even the Liberal Party used to believe it was antidemocratic for one party to make up the rules. Now the Premier is the only political leader left in Ontario defending a system where one party makes the rules for a democracy of 14 million people.

Will this Premier take a step back, do the right thing and agree to a non-partisan process led by an independent panel? That's what Ontarians deserve. That's what she needs to show some leadership on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, there are a number of issues. One that I'd be very interested to hear the leader of the third party opine on is a proposal on constraints on loans and loan guarantees to parties and candidates, including leadership candidates. It would be enlightening to hear her opinion on that, Mr. Speaker.

But the reality is that the leader of the third party talks about the democratic process, and I would suggest to her the democratic process that looks at legislation, brings legislation forward, allows for consultation, goes to committee and has commentary.

In fact, for example, right now I know the leader of the third party would understand that members of her party are working with the government party on the cap-and-trade legislation to give us an input. That's a very good thing, because that's part of the democratic process. All parties have the opportunity to either obstruct or to co-operate, and that's part of the democratic process.

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ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. Last week, Democracy Watch said, "Key democracy laws across Canada are usually developed by all parties after meaningful public consultation and the Ontario Liberals should follow this tradition before changing the political finance system."

The Premier has accused anyone who has criticized her plan of delaying and stalling for their purposes. Does she really believe that Democracy Watch and the Green Party of Ontario are only interested in stalling and delaying?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me be perfectly clear: What I have put forward are some proposals for positions that could go into draft legislation. I had a meeting with the leaders of the opposition parties. I said to them, "These are the things that I'm thinking about. These are the things that have happened in other jurisdictions. These are the things that have been part of the public discussion. I think we need to refine them. We need to have a discussion about them. How about we work together on draft legislation?" And right now, the government House leader is talking with the other House leaders about how they might have input into draft legislation.

We have not put forward a set-in-stone plan. What we have said is, "Here are some things that need to be discussed." This is the proposition for consultation that would take the unusual step of sending draft legislation out after first reading and out after second reading, after conversation with the opposition parties on the draft of that legislation. Only at that point would we then have the opportunity to vote on that legislation and put those changes in place, expeditiously, by the beginning of January 2017.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What this Premier refuses to be open about is the fact that both the leader of the Conservative Party—the official opposition—and myself, at that meeting, spent our time urging this Premier to put in place a process that is absolutely non-partisan, because that is what the people of this province deserve. She ignored that advice and she continues to ignore that advice.

The laws that govern our democracy should be built to last, not based on the whims of one political party. The

Premier is setting a dangerous precedent here, that any majority government can change Ontario's election laws whenever and however they want. One political leader shouldn't be making decisions for a democracy of 14 million people.

Will this Premier finally do the right thing and open up this process to a non-partisan panel, where it belongs and where people can have faith in the results?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would argue that there's nothing more democratic than the Ontario Legislature. Everyone in this House has been elected to debate legislation. That's our job: to introduce, debate and pass laws.

We're not alone in this kind of process. As I said yesterday, the Alberta NDP introduced legislation called An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. They introduced legislation; then they sent the bill to committee for public consultations.

Back in 2003, Prime Minister Chrétien made changes to the Canada Elections Act. He didn't call a royal commission to make these changes. He introduced a bill, it was sent to committee, and it was then amended based on the feedback that they received.

The NDP in Manitoba amended the Election Financing Act in 2012. They introduced a bill to change the annual allowance and then introduced new third-party rules. That's what we're doing—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplement-ary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The head of Treasury Board over there should know very well that when these processes are undertaken in ways that are not non-partisan and that are not open and democratic in terms of engaging people, then the rules don't last. That is the point. Ontarians deserve rules that last, not rules that are changed at the whim of any government that happens to have power in this Legislature. That's the principal issue that we're discussing here, and this government obstinately refuses to acknowledge that it is in fact an extremely important issue.

The Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the Green Party and I set aside our partisanship to call for this independent panel. I'm calling on this Premier to do the same thing: to set aside her partisanship and accept a process that is fair for every Ontarian and not just about the Liberal Party. Why can't the Premier put a little faith in Ontarians, show a little bit of humility, have some confidence in the people of this province and make a non-partisan process occur?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I find it curious that the leader of the third party says these rules don't last. I'd love to actually see what she's talking about on that.

We think it's time to move forward on important changes. We think it's time to ban corporate donations. We think it's time to ban union donations. We think it's time to look really hard at rules around third-party advertising.

There are a number of changes where there is a broad consensus we need to move on. We welcome the input

from the opposition parties, but they are refusing to provide anything other than an attack on the process—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we're not prepared to stall this legislation. We want to move forward. We want to have public consultations over the summer so we can pass the legislation and bring these rule changes in as soon as we possibly can.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Yesterday, I questioned the minister on the government's continued rationing of health care: the fact that new patients no longer can access stem cell transplants in Ontario, the fact that the wait-list at Princess Margaret hospital is over 200 days. The minister's response was purely misleading. The money announced by—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I withdraw.

The minister's response was not quite accurate, Mr. Speaker. The money announced by the minister will have no effect in the system for up to two years. Patients now have two choices: die, or travel out of country for their treatments.

We have gone from one treatment out of country a year upward to 202, at a cost of two to three times that of Ontario's. Patients must also bear the costs of living expenses for themselves and caregivers for up to six months.

Will the minister stop the political rhetoric and give an honest answer to Ontarians on how the government will help those seeking stem cell transplants in Ontario today instead of two years from now?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, currently, there are six hospitals in Ontario that provide stem cell transplants. As I mentioned yesterday, because of technological advancements, the number of individuals who are eligible, particularly for allogeneic, which is a donor transplant for the individual, has increased quite dramatically in this province, and that's a positive thing. It's great for the individuals.

We do realize that has led to wait-lists, which we are working on in two different ways—capital investments at \$30 million that were announced in our budget and recently passed, which will go to increasing the number of beds and the ability for those centres to provide even more care. But we also understand that there are operational pressures, and so CCO, Cancer Care Ontario, has a responsibility of working with these six centres. We're working with them on the capital, we're working with them on the operational, but we're also providing that

option for individuals for out-of-country treatments, should they so choose it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the minister: The six other centres are also operating at full capacity.

The situation highlights the continued mismanagement of health care by this government, and the situation did not come about without warning. In 2008, Cancer Care Ontario released a report to this government. It stated: "Access to transplant services in Ontario is at imminent risk.... Services in the greater Toronto area need to be augmented as there is only one program to serve the entire region." The government ignored that warning. Now the system is broken and Ontarians are suffering.

Will the minister admit that they failed Ontarians, ignored the warnings of imminent collapse of the system, and offer immediate relief to patients needing life-saving stem cell transplants?

1140

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think we owe it to the individuals and their families who may be on the wait-list to be as factual about this as we possibly can. Since that report came out, in fact, in the last four years, we've increased the funding for stem cell transplants in this province by 600%, and that doesn't include the nearly \$30-million investment outlined in our budget.

At Princess Margaret hospital, in the last year alone, they've increased the number of transplants that take place—

Interjections.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I know opposition doesn't want to hear the truth, but I'm telling them that they've increased the number of transplants taking place at Princess Margaret hospital by 25%—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The conversations going back and forth, not even to the questioner or the person presenting the question, are disruptive. So stop, please.

You have a wrap-up, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We're also working together with Cancer Care Ontario to see how we can use the network more effectively, so if there is a pressure in one location and there's opportunity in another—and there is opportunity in other centres—we're making sure that we work as a network to make sure we allocate resources appropriately.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. A formal investigation into the death of Mr. Andrew Loku, a 45-year-old father of five from South Sudan shot by the police last summer, was finished a month ago, but the Attorney General just read the report yesterday, more than a month later and only after increasing media scrutiny.

Given the serious concerns that members of the community have raised around systemic racism and dis-

criminatory practices like carding, after the killing of a racialized man, you would think the minister would understand the importance of reading a report of this nature. Yet the minister found other more important things to do.

Can the Premier tell us why her minister took over a month to read this very important report?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We recognize that there are concerns about the current process, including whether SIU reports are made public. I think that's the essence of this question and it's exactly why we have committed to a review. The Ministry of the Attorney General will appoint someone as soon as possible to conduct a review of the SIU, the Office of the Independent Police Review Director and the Ontario Civilian Police Commission—and I committed to that when I spoke to the Black Lives Matter folks here at Queen's Park.

We have a responsibility to ensure that the public interest is being served, and that's why we've committed to public consultations. As part of these discussions, there will be a conversation about how the information in the SIU reports should be made public, because I believe that is, as I say, the essence of the concerns around this process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The Attorney General's handling of this file is simply unacceptable. It seemed as though the minister purposely avoided reading the details of this report. Given the context—that the community organized a massive, lengthy protest in front of Toronto police headquarters, that the community organized a massive rally in front of Queen's Park, raising issues and concerns around systemic racism in this province—does the Premier really think that this is appropriate behaviour for the Attorney General of the province of Ontario?

For the sake of the public's confidence in Ontario's oversight of the police, it's essential that the details around the SIU's investigation and their handling of the evidence be made public. The Premier alluded to this; we want a firm commitment today.

My question, Mr. Speaker, is this: Will the Premier commit today to ensuring that that report is made public?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just said that as part of the discussions, there will be a conversation about how the information in the SIU reports should be made public. I have already answered that.

It was I and my ministers who went to the front lawn and had the conversation with the Black Lives Matter protestors; we had the conversation. I acknowledge that in our society, we are still grappling with systemic racism. That's the conversation I had with those young people who were standing on the lawn at Queen's Park.

We've committed to the review. There has already been a meeting with our minister responsible for the Anti-Racism Directorate with some of the folks from the group. I am very concerned about this issue. I know it is something that we all should be taking seriously. The Ministry of the Attorney General will be appointing someone to head up the reviews as soon as possible. We

will be working towards how to make the information in the SIU report public.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Education. Investing in schools is part of building Ontario up, an important way for the government to respond to local needs and to build contemporary learning environments for students. In the recent 2016 provincial budget, there's a plan to invest in school capital projects, to address accommodation and building conditions.

It is really disappointing that the parties opposite voted against the plan to invest \$11 billion over 10 years in our schools. Speaker, through you to the minister, can she please explain how these budget measures will help families in my riding of Ottawa South and families across Ontario?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member from Ottawa South for that very good question about our budget. Since 2003, our government has invested almost \$14 billion in school infrastructure, which has resulted in nearly 755 new schools and more than 720 additions and renovations. As of earlier this year, approximately 200 major capital projects are either being planned or under way across Ontario. With the \$11-billion commitment to more capital grants over the next 10 years that was in our capital budget in the 2016 budget, which they all voted against, we'll be able to provide \$52 million to build two new schools in Ottawa, along with four retrofits and some additions. We're investing \$9 million to consolidate two schools into a new Greensville public school in Hamilton and we're providing \$15 million to rebuild—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: I thank the minister for that answer and we look forward to those new capital projects.

I would like to address another issue that affects families, parents and children, and that's child care. In this year's 2016 budget, we announced our plan to invest in the child care sector. Families across this province rely heavily on access to our child care system and are looking for more available spaces. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, could she please tell us how this 2016 budget is going to address those needs that, actually, both the NDP and the Progressive Conservatives voted against?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes. As is always the case, in our 2016 budget we continue to commit to child care, because child care provides a strong foundation for our youngest learners and we're committed to modernizing the child care system. In fact, the number of licensed child care spaces in Ontario has grown to nearly 351,000, which is an increase of 87% since 2003. In the 2016 provincial budget, we announced that we would invest \$120 million in child care by creating approximately 4,000 new licensed child care spaces in local schools to give children the opportunity to transition more easily into their local full-day kindergarten program. Over the

next few months, in fact, Speaker, we'll be working on providing families increased access to safe, high-quality, licensed child care with 122 new child care rooms as a result of this year's budget that they voted against.

ASSISTIVE DEVICES

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. We've been voicing concerns over the inexcusable delays in the Assistive Devices Program that are leaving our most vulnerable citizens too long to get their wheelchairs, walkers and other mobility aids. I've heard the minister give himself platitudes, saying he was proud of the program, so I respectfully remind him that in 2009 they had a backlog of 3,200 clients and said a 16-week delay was unacceptable. Today we're hearing about a 50-week delay or, in another client's case, 60 weeks. The minister needs to commit to wiping out the backlog and fixing the inefficient approvals process.

Speaker, through you I ask, what is the minister's plan to ensure that those who have been left waiting by this ineffective approvals process will get access to the medical aids they need and deserve in a timely manner?

1150

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

I want to also acknowledge that with us today are members of the Canadian Assistive Devices Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important program for the government and it's an important program for many thousands of Ontarians, but we on this side realize that we need to continue to improve it to work better. It's challenging because we have over 8,000 different devices and supports that we provide. We provide assistance to the level of 75% of the support, and the client is responsible for the remaining 25%. For specific devices, whether it's on the maintenance or the procurement side, we are working not only with providers but we're working within the ministry to continuously find ways that we can improve the system and make it work better for the patient, for the client.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I've written the minister about the very egregious examples of this backlog: Jeff Preston, who waited one year for just an assessment, and Morris Caby, who waited one year and two months to get his motorized wheelchair.

The backlog consists of some of Ontario's most vulnerable, severely disabled citizens—people in need—and you've left them waiting far too long. Clearly, the approval process set up by this government is not working.

I ask the minister to consider a recommendation from the Canadian Assistive Devices Association to wipe out the backlog by bringing in product approval timelines that take into account prior testing and ensure oversight of the new process. Will he agree to do this to reduce

processing time and, most importantly, ensure people receive service as quickly as possible?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: This is a good example, Mr. Speaker, of where the opposition party is providing good advice and suggestions for us of what we need to look at as we continue to work on the wait-list and the backlog.

We have a standard for claims, in terms of processing them, so that they are processed in six to eight weeks. We've dramatically increased our investment to where now it's almost half a billion dollars that we invest in this program each year—and about 350,000 clients. So it's enormously complex.

I appreciate the very valid and good suggestions that the member opposite has spoken about. We are looking at precisely some of those types of things. I'd be happy to have a conversation with the member to see what further advice he has so that we can strengthen this and reduce the wait-list and the backlog as much as possible.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Energy. Electricity prices are going up again. For the eighth year in a row, electricity rates will be more than 9% higher this year than they were the previous year. Amazingly, the Ontario Energy Board blames this cost increase on the fact that Ontarians are using less electricity.

The government keeps signing lucrative contracts with private generators that guarantee inflated prices for energy we don't need. Amazingly, the minister wants to sign even more private contracts.

Surely the minister has met his fundraising quota by now. Will he stop signing these wasteful private contracts that force Ontarians to pay more for using less electricity?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the member knows that the system is based on full cost recovery. The example he referred to was that this past winter the consumption was lower than normal. That's the first time that we can find where this has occurred. I'm sure the member knows that we work on a full-cost-recovery basis. There's the cost of the commodity, which is the amount used, and he knows full well that there's also the cost of connection—the cost of commodity. There are also the wires and poles that are included. They're all included in the price.

What he should know, Mr. Speaker, is that he's talking about electricity price increases—and when I get to the supplementary, I want to speak particularly to comparables of Ontario to other jurisdictions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, it's very simple: When Ontarians use less electricity, they should pay less. But that's not how it works in Ontario.

Ontarians do their part by conserving energy, but private generators get paid whether Ontario needs the energy or not. And if Ontarians don't need their energy, these private generators will keep firing up their gas

plants so they can sell energy—energy that Ontarians pay top dollar for, energy that's sold to other jurisdictions at pennies on the dollar. Things will only get worse as Hydro One starts demanding its own higher private profits.

When will the minister get electricity prices under control and finally put public need ahead of private greed?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The member knows that it's the IESO who determines who fires up and who doesn't fire up as system operators. But he's talking about a 2.5% bill increase as a result of the blip that happened this winter.

Let's compare that to BC Hydro: Rates increased by 4% on April 1, 2016. Or SaskPower: Rates increased by 5% in 2015. Or Manitoba Hydro, which applied for a rate increase of 3.95% on April 1, 2016. Newfoundland Power applied for a rate increase of 3.6% for residential customers as of July 1, 2016.

He's talking about a 2.5% increase in Ontario. We're doing very well compared to the other provinces.

PREGNANCY AND INFANT LOSS

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to ask a question of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I'd like to ask him a question that is rarely asked, and never asked in any other provincial Legislature, and is finally being addressed in this provincial Legislature, and that is about the 30,000 women every year in this province who experience pregnancy and infant loss. These are mothers, these are sisters, these are wives who, unfortunately, through miscarriages and stillbirths, lose a baby.

Up until now, essentially they've not been treated up to proper health standards when they experience pregnancy loss. Thankfully—I thank members from both sides of the House—we passed a bill for the first time in North America to recognize that women who experience pregnancy loss need proper health care and support—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, this is, of course, an issue that affects a great many people, individuals and families across the province. I want to start by taking this opportunity to congratulate—I think “thanking” is a better word—the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for the passage of Bill 141, which is the Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness, Research and Care Act.

Many families are affected by miscarriage or stillbirth and the challenge and the isolation that that can bring. Our government, indeed the entire Legislature, heard from many Ontarians during our pre-budget consultations that were held across the province. We heard directly from families and patient advocates who, themselves, were suffering or had suffered from pregnancy loss and infant loss.

Because of their strength and advocacy, I'm pleased to announce that our government, this year, is providing \$1 million to fund support services for those affected by pregnancy loss and infant loss.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: A supplementary to the minister: The 30,000 every year—I mean, people just forget that. There are 30,000 women every year who experience this tragic situation. Many of our hospitals, our doctors and our nurses are trying to do their best, but there isn't a comprehensive standard of care so that you can get the proper support from your doctor or from your nurse when you go through this tragic loss.

I thank the minister and I thank all the courageous women who came to the hearings to express the need to do something.

What I want to know is, can we do more as we go forward to ensure that there are standards of care for these mothers who lose their babies as a result of pregnancy, and can we outline a plan where you can get services, whether you're in Kenora, Cornwall or down the street at Mount Sinai?

1200

Hon. Eric Hoskins: That \$1 million will be provided to support and develop programs regarding pregnancy and infant loss, including resources to train volunteers and support families who have experienced loss. In May, Mount Sinai Hospital will be hosting a pregnancy and infant loss summit. I look forward to hearing about that discussion. My ministry, of course, will continue to work with our exceptional maternal and neonatal doctors, nurses and researchers. As well, we have world-renowned hospitals like Mount Sinai and Sunnybrook to ensure that women across Ontario get the health care and support that they need when they experience pregnancy loss and infant loss.

Once again, I commend the Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network and the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for their dedication to maternal and neonatal care here in Ontario.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. The Rideau Carleton Raceway is home to a thousand local jobs in Ottawa, particularly in my constituency. But over the past number of years, my constituents have been under attack: first, with the modernization plan that your government brought in by eliminating the slots-at-racetracks program in 2012, and now with locked-out workers.

Last month, I asked the Premier about her government's modernization plan. At the time, she and the Minister of Labour refused to give a clear answer on what the consequences would be for the Rideau Carleton Raceway. But just last week, my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock addressed in this assembly that a casino has been awarded to Peterborough, and the end result there will kill horse racing and possibly even the slots at Kawartha Downs. So my question to the Premier is, can I expect this to happen in Ottawa as well?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question. I recognize the concerns that the member speaks of. I also recognize that we are trying to modernize Ontario Lottery and Gaming and support racing in our communities. In fact, we continue to provide racing as a priority for Ontario Lottery and Gaming by merging that effort, recognizing that it's a vibrant industry that needs to be supported and, at the same time, needs to be sustainable. It's why we've taken the steps necessary to concentrate on that endeavour and, at the same time, work with the communities and municipalities which will ultimately decide where the gaming operation should be.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Mr. Speaker, that is as clear as his answer yesterday on hydro prices.

I must say, if he's really concerned about horse racing in Ontario, he only has to look at my colleague's constituency in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, where you are going to end the horse racing in that community, and you're likely going to start ending horse racing in Nepean–Carleton, at the Rideau Carleton Raceway.

On top of that, we have 124 RCR slot workers who have been locked out for the past four months. The OLG has ignored multiple requests to go back to the table. We had a car accident there on the weekend because patrons, as well as the locked-out workers, are getting very frustrated.

I think it's time that this government takes the OLG to task for its modernization plan and the impact it has had not only on the horse racing community across this province, but also on the slot workers, who are being treated unfairly. So I have a question: Will you take this seriously, and will you work with my constituents in order to see the viability and sustainability of the Rideau Carleton Raceway for not only horse racing but also the slots?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to go back. We put the panel in place—the Honourable John Snobelen, the Honourable Elmer Buchanan and the Honourable John Wilkinson. At that particular time, if the opposition benches had listened today to Mr. Snobelen, their former front-bench colleague, he said that the slots-at-racetracks program had no transparency and no accountability and that we had to move to a new system for the province of Ontario.

We took the advice of those three very distinguished individuals to put in place a framework to sustain horse racing in the province of Ontario. That was a program that was endorsed by those three individuals. If the opposition had taken the time to listen to the budget speech by the finance minister—we've extended the framework two more years in the province of Ontario, to bring stability to this industry and support rural Ontario.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Today, a group of experts released a letter outlining concerns with the govern-

ment's recent decision to remove children from intensive therapy. It states that "abandonment of our clients is in serious violation of the BCBA code of ethics." Certification guidelines state that treatment should be based on clinical need and not on constraint by age. ONTABA highlights a need for transition to more consistency with the ethical obligations to protect the best interests of clients.

Even the minister's own report doesn't suggest kicking kids five and over off the waiting list. It doesn't say that IBI is ineffective over the age of five, as much as she insinuates that it does—because it doesn't.

Why is the minister ignoring experts who are sounding alarm bells about their ethical duties not to abandon children with ASD?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, I'm actually glad my critic has raised this question, because it was just yesterday when I met with ONTABA to talk to them about clinical evidence when it comes to children with ASD. They came to me with some very concrete and practical advice.

We also talked about how we're going to be moving forward as we expand the autism program for children—the 16,000 new spaces and the \$333 million. We'll have an implementation committee to guide the work as we move through this transition. This is year one. Next year is year two.

I very much appreciate hearing from Ontaba and others, as well as the existing clinical expert committee that not only gave us advice, but they did go out and talk to service providers. They did go out and talk to parents, and they did go out and talk to board-certified behavioural analysts too.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Contrary to the minister's comments, parents are already receiving letters removing their children from wait-lists as of May 1.

Service providers are telling parents that they have no idea what enhancement will look like, and that their children will be placed on a different wait-list in 2018.

Schools have been blindsided. They are not sure how they will handle an influx of children with no support.

Implementation of this program has already gone off the rails. Families who have been offered contracts are being told they will be removed after only six months, even though the expert report suggests that intensive therapy be for a minimum of a year.

Why is the minister ignoring the advice of her own expert committee and removing kids from therapy after only six months—or, for some, after zero months?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It's important to again remind the Legislature here that children who are being removed from wait-lists are going into immediate service. That's very important. That's a big part of the \$333 million and the 16,000 new spaces.

It's also important to note that every family with a child with ASD getting service received a two-page letter outlining what this transition is going to look like. It's from their service provider, which can answer the questions that they may have.

It's important to also remember that in the new, enhanced autism program in Ontario, the services will be more intense, will be of longer duration and will focus on the individual needs of children.

I know families have questions. We'll keep working hard to make sure that the families get the answers they need from this government, from their service provider and from my ministry.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Speaker, this government has taken decided action on two important areas. First, this government's leadership on renewable energy has established Ontario as an international leader in the green energy economy. Second, this government has placed a priority on aboriginal community engagement in economic development. This is very important.

There are many examples that demonstrate this commitment to have aboriginal communities create enterprises and to partner with private sector companies on meaningful economic opportunities. First Nation and Métis communities across Ontario, including in my riding of Barrie, have embraced the opportunities to offer their competitive advantages and partner on energy projects.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please tell this House more about Ontario's work with aboriginal enterprises on energy projects?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member from Barrie for the question. Our government believes First Nation and Métis enterprises are playing an important economic development role in the energy sector. The Ministry of Energy facilitates aboriginal-owned companies, through several aboriginal funding programs.

In total, about 66 First Nation and Métis enterprises are involved in renewable energy projects. These 66 enterprises are participating in more than 500 projects, representing over 1,500 megawatts of clean energy capacity in every part of the province.

More than that, 77 proposed renewable energy projects representing 49 aboriginal enterprises have been approved for funding under the Aboriginal Renewable Energy Fund. We will continue to build on this collaboration.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you to the minister for those answers.

Minister, last month the Independent Electricity System Operator awarded 16 large renewable energy contracts. This was good news for Ontarians and good news for aboriginal enterprises from Ontario, who were partners in a number of contracts that were awarded. This procurement was done through a new, broadly consulted competitive process. As you have said, Minister, this procurement was designed to strike a balance between early community engagement and achieving value for rate-payers.

There have been questions raised by a member of this House on whether a First Nation energy enterprise can participate in projects in every part of the province or whether they should be limited geographically. Minister, could you please clarify this for me and for all of our constituents?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I hope the Leader of the Opposition pays careful attention to this answer.

Of the 16 contracts awarded, more than 80% of the projects include participation from one or more aboriginal enterprises, with five projects including aboriginal enterprises with more than 50% equity. Unfortunately, this process has received criticisms from the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, who claims that a company owned by a First Nation located 1,000 kilometres away should not be allowed to partner in a bid in the municipality of Dutton Dunwich.

In a free-trading Ontario, where companies from France, Germany and the US bid for energy contracts, it is appalling and unacceptable for a member of this House to suggest a company partnering with a First Nation enterprise is disentitled to participate. The way I was brought up, this is discrimination. Will the Leader of the Opposition reprimand this member?

RARE DISEASES

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Minister of Health. Last month, Queen's Park was filled with close to a hundred patients, families and caregivers of those affected by rare diseases. They and many patients across the province watched the private member's motion they had been counting on to create a select committee on rare disease treatment and support voted down by this Liberal government. They also heard the minister announce a working group focused on rare diseases "to begin action now ... to begin taking concrete steps." Those were his words.

It's been over a month. Will the minister tell us what action and concrete steps have been taken by his working group to serve the needs of rare disease patients here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. The first rare disease that we focused on was EDS, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, and we put together an expert panel late last year to almost use it as a test case to see if we could develop a different approach. As a result of that, which included a lot of input from patients, patient advocates and experts, of course, we are creating and we funded a centre of excellence at the University Health Network specifically for EDS, so that those individuals with that rare disease will have a one-stop shop of access and education for health care providers—a whole set of important issues.

What we are doing is we're expanding that. It's being led in part by SickKids hospital, because many of these diseases and conditions are found among children. We're working on it, and I would hope the member would appreciate that it may take more than the month that has

transpired for us to make sure that we've got the composition of that working group correct—the proper leadership, the proper patients and patient advocates—so we can do, in a broader sense, what we have already done with EDS.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The time for question period is over. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1214 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DUNCAN HAWTHORNE

Mr. Bill Walker: It is my pleasure to rise and recognize one of the brightest and boldest nuclear leaders, with a most revered work ethic and legacy, that this province and this country have seen in generations. Duncan Hawthorne, the affable and straight-shooting president and chief executive officer of Bruce Power, has announced that he will be stepping down after leading Canada's only private nuclear power plant for 15 successful years.

It's an understatement to say that Duncan, an engineer who had advanced from the shop floor to hold senior positions in the UK, US and Canada, has revolutionized nuclear after rebuilding units 1 and 2 at Bruce Power, the world's largest operating nuclear facility and home to eight Candu reactors. The remaining six reactors have been approved for refurbishment under his leadership and will revitalize the economies across the regions of Grey, Bruce and Huron and, in fact, the entire province.

In his 15 years at Bruce Power, Duncan's can-do attitude has helped him reach every goal he has endeavoured to pursue. Just last year, Bruce Power achieved record output for the site, providing over 30% of Ontario's electricity at 30% below the average cost of electricity. Under his leadership, Bruce Power has secured production until 2064.

I sincerely enjoyed working with Duncan, which I did up until I ran for public office in 2011, and had the privilege of seeing him work relentlessly to return the site to its full eight-unit potential, thereby establishing a long-term structure that ensures safe, reliable, clean and low-cost electricity for the people of Ontario.

I know Duncan will be greatly missed by Bruce Power's 3,000 permanent employees, including boiler-makers, carpenters, electricians, insulators, ironworkers and rodmen, labourers, millwrights, operating engineers, painters, pipefitters, plumbers, sheet metal and roofers, teamsters and the thousands of tradespeople who will work on the refurb.

I invite the House to join me in thanking Duncan for all he has contributed to our community and province and wishing him and his wife, Leslie, all the best, as they return home to the UK, where Duncan will be taking on the challenge of building a new nuclear fleet, the one thing he has not accomplished—yet.

Thank you, Duncan Hawthorne.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Following the last election, people had high hopes for this Premier and her government. They believed her when she said that she was going to change the way things were done in this province. Well, it turns out that things have changed: They're worse. They're worse for the people right across this province, but they're getting desperate for northerners.

One woman who lives in Wabigoon, just outside of Dryden, wrote to me about how bad things are getting. She writes:

"Both my son and daughter-in-law work minimum-wage jobs. They have three children. Groceries, vehicle insurance, heating costs and hydro are already out of control. Guess roll out the food bank. Daycare is outrageous. We, the grandparents, have tried to hobble out a schedule. My husband does not work; he is disabled. I work full-time. At this rate, I will never be able to retire. We help our family with child care, groceries, gasoline and 'mini loans' in between paydays. We live in Wabigoon/Dryden—no mass transportation here. Oh, their fourth-owner vehicle died (a private vehicle is a requirement, not a luxury, here in NWO). They are currently using my old vehicle. Funds to buy a newer one are just not there. I ashamed of this government."

Speaker, this woman hit the nail on the head of what this government is doing wrong in northern Ontario, and countless others share her struggle. It's disgusting that people should have to work so hard and still not get ahead. When will this government start prioritizing the very basic needs of northerners?

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Yvan Baker: Earlier this year, Mayor John Tory announced that he's changing the western portion of the SmartTrack transit plan along Eglinton Avenue to replace heavy rail with an LRT. The LRT would connect Mount Dennis to the Mississauga Airport Corporate Centre and Pearson airport.

I have been following this issue closely, Speaker. The Eglinton corridor is vital to my community, and while some have expressed excitement about new transit, I've also heard concerns how an LRT could impact traffic along the Eglinton corridor.

I personally believe in smart transit that is built with community input, on the basis of a strong business case, and includes a plan to address the impacts on the local community. We need a plan that can deliver excellent transit for riders that serves the local community and ensures that taxpayers' dollars are spent wisely. To achieve this, I have consulted with members of the community and local residents and ratepayers' organizations. I co-hosted a transit town hall with Ontario's Minister of Transportation, Steven Del Duca, so that the minister could hear directly from members of my community; participated in a local consultation, co-hosted by the city of Toronto and Metrolinx; and I met with Premier

Kathleen Wynne and Minister Steven Del Duca to share my constituents' perspective and feedback.

I know how important it is to build transit, but it is also important that we build the right transit. To give a blind endorsement of a transit project without knowing all the impacts is not why I ran to be an MPP. I look forward to welcoming the Minister of Transportation to Etobicoke Centre in the coming weeks to see for himself. We need a transit solution that is beneficial to commuters, to taxpayers and to our community, and I won't stop working until we achieve that goal.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I rise again in this House to raise an issue of great concern to my riding and that of the municipality of Dutton Dunwich. A few weeks ago, this Liberal government ordered five wind turbine projects across the province. One of those projects was in my own riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London, in the municipality of Dutton Dunwich, who were emphatically against the wind project.

In fact, the municipality of Dutton Dunwich did their due diligence, conducted a survey of the residents and did all that before declaring themselves a non-willing host. The survey showed that a whopping 84% of the community was against the wind turbine project in the municipality. That survey was shared with the ministry, and many meetings were held to discuss the municipality's desire to be a non-willing host and remain free of any wind turbine projects.

However, at the same time, the municipality of Malahide in my riding, just to the east, declared themselves a willing host and had a company submit a project to the ministry. That project was denied, whereas the Dutton Dunwich project was approved.

The government stated that municipalities would have a say in wind power; however, it is clear that that is furthest from the truth. This government is blatantly ignoring rural Ontario and the local voice. In testimony at a committee in November 2013, this energy minister said that municipalities would be given a veto of their projects, and that it would be very rare, indeed, for any approved projects without a municipal backing. It would be almost impossible for somebody to win one of those bidding processes without support from the local municipality.

I'm calling on this government to stop the wind project in Dutton Dunwich. It's tearing the community apart. It is my hope that this government do the right thing, hold true to their word, and relook at the legitimacy of this project.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, 26 cents' difference for the price of gas across the province of Ontario: Tell me how that makes any sense. Tell me how a gas company who refines gasoline in this province can get

away with selling gas at a 26-cent differential per gallon in different parts of the province.

In Kirkland Lake versus Timmins, which is not very far—it's an hour and 45 minutes down the highway—there's a 12-cent difference. Clearly, the gas companies are colluding and doing everything they can to put as much money into their pockets at the cost of the consumer.

We as a province have the ability to regulate. The city of Timmins has taken a position that they're bringing to council. They're going to be trying to organize various municipalities in order to try to get this provincial government to move on gas price regulation, so that we can limit what those companies are doing and take away these huge differentials that we have, where you can sell gas at a 26-cents-a-litre difference from one part of the province to another.

I commend our council and our mayor, Steve Black, for taking this on and working with us. What's interesting is that the city of Timmins is seeing this not as an issue just for Timmins, but they're trying to bring the other communities into this—Kirkland Lake; North Bay is already there, and a whole bunch of other municipalities—to be able to tell this government: You need to stand up for the consumers of this province. You need to utilize your regulatory powers as a province and regulate the price of gas so that the consumer doesn't get gouged.

DURHAM COLLEGE

Mr. Granville Anderson: Yesterday the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities came to Durham region with good news. Since 1969, the Simcoe Building has been standing at the campus of Durham College, though it was clear to everyone that it was only meant to be a temporary fixture.

Now, with \$22 million in funding from our government, the Simcoe building will be replaced with a new facility, one with a planned health science centre and entrepreneurship centre. My daughter attended Durham College, and I know that everyone in my riding sees the campus as a gem in our region and a real benefit to our community.

1510

I want to congratulate the staff and students on the work they have done ahead of the college's 50th anniversary in 2017. I also want to thank the member from Ajax-Pickering and the Minister of Children and Youth Services, who, along with myself, have been tireless advocates for the college from our side of the House.

I should thank the member from Oshawa and the current and former members from Whitby-Oshawa for their efforts as well. I hope we can continue to work together in doing what is right for Durham College and what is right for the region of Durham.

DARCY McKEOUGH

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Darcy McKeough, MPP for Chatham-Kent from 1963 to 1977, served from the 27th

Parliament of Ontario through to the 31st Parliament. Mr. McKeough served his community and his province proudly as Treasurer of Ontario, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Energy under the Bill Davis PC government.

In his time here, he was no stranger to the thrust and parry of the Legislature. He could duke it out with the best of them and, more often than not, he gave better than he got. He was mockingly dubbed the "Duke of Kent" by an opposition MPP, but Darcy wore it as a badge of honour. To this very day, he's affectionately referred to as the Duke of Kent not only in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex but across Ontario.

In 1972, Mr. McKeough was part of a minor scandal when just one of 2,000 rubber-stamp approvals he made as Minister of Municipal Affairs drew questions as a potential conflict of interest. He resigned immediately because it was the right thing to do morally and, as time has shown, even politically. When asked if he feels it was still the right decision to step down considering the larger scandals that have rocketed provincial politics in recent years without anyone resigning, McKeough said "absolutely." He set a standard for accountability that should be followed today.

McKeough went toe to toe with Ontario Hydro and put a focus on achieving budget surpluses before it was even fashionable. These lessons and countless more can be found in his memoir, *The Duke of Kent*. Thank you, Darcy, for what you have done in this Ontario Legislature, and thank you for what you continue to do for the residents of Chatham-Kent.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I didn't see a prop.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Community safety is an on-going issue throughout Ontario, and our government is creating strategies for a safer Ontario. Recently, there has been an increase in crime in Brampton, and residents are truly concerned. With pizza robberies, break-and-enters and pets being stolen, the concern is genuine.

In December, we had Minister Naqvi come to Brampton-Springdale to listen to the input of residents about street checks to ensure that police interactions with the public are without bias, are consistent and are carried out in a manner that promotes public confidence.

The province takes the protection of human rights very seriously and has zero tolerance for any form of marginalization or discrimination that violates rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Ontario does not support any practice where police are stopping individuals without reason or cause.

I also hosted another town hall in January in collaboration with Peel police, Peel Crime Prevention and Peel Crime Stoppers for the local jewellers in the community. In light of the recent occurrences, the community needed to gain valuable knowledge on how to protect themselves and their families. Mayor Bonnie Crombie and Mississ-

sauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish have also been very active on this.

Tomorrow, we'll be hosting a town hall with Minister Naqvi again. We want to invite community members to join us to give us their input on some of the changes we'll be making in the Police Services Act and modernizing police services.

ORDRE DE LA PLÉIADE

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: C'est avec grande fierté que nous avons célébré lundi la Pléiade 2016, l'Ordre de la Francophonie et du dialogue des cultures, lequel reconnaît chaque année six Ontariennes ou Ontariens pour s'être démarqués de façon exceptionnelle par leur contribution à faire rayonner la langue française. Cette distinction marque ainsi les efforts et l'apport indéniables de ces individus à la promotion de la culture française dans leurs communautés respectives mais aussi au niveau de la francophonie partout en Ontario.

Je tenais à féliciter tout particulièrement devant cette Chambre un de mes commettants, reçu Chevalier de l'ordre, M. Louis Patry. Louis a travaillé avec détermination, persévérance et passion pour faire la promotion d'Orléans et de la francophonie à Ottawa. On le reconnaît aussi pour sa bataille sans relâche de l'accent aigu sur « Orléans ».

Félicitations une fois de plus aux six récipiendaires de cette année: M. Louis Patry d'Orléans, Carmen Portelance de Dowling, Lorraine Hamilton de Burlington, Pierre Foucher d'Ottawa, Diane Dubois de St. Thomas et Alain Beaudoin de Newmarket. Vous êtes des symboles pour les générations qui suivent.

Merci à l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie pour cette initiative qui a vu le jour en 1976.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup. I thank all members for their statements.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ACCESSIBLE PARKING IN MUNICIPALITIES ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 CONCERNANT LA COMMISSION D'ENQUÊTE SUR LE STATIONNEMENT ACCESSIBLE DANS LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Mrs. Martow moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 187, An Act to establish a commission of inquiry into accessible parking in municipalities / Projet de loi 187, Loi visant la création d'une commission d'enquête sur le stationnement accessible dans les municipalités.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mrs. Gila Martow: This is a bill that requires the Premier to recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that a commission be appointed to inquire into and report on accessible parking in municipalities for persons with disabilities and to make recommendations, including recommendations for legislative measures, for encouraging municipalities to adopt standard bylaws in that area and to enforce them.

TIME TO CARE ACT (LONG-TERM CARE HOMES AMENDMENT, MINIMUM STANDARD OF DAILY CARE), 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE TEMPS ALLOUÉ AUX SOINS (MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES FOYERS DE SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE ET PRÉVOYANT UNE NORME MINIMALE EN MATIÈRE DE SOINS QUOTIDIENS)

M^{me} Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 188, An Act to amend the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007 to establish a minimum standard of daily care / Projet de loi 188, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les foyers de soins de longue durée afin d'établir une norme minimale en matière de soins quotidiens.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The bill simply amends the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007, so that a long-term-care home will have to provide its residents with at least four hours a day of nursing and personal support services, averaged across all the residents. The minimum hours may be increased by regulation. The short title of the bill is called Time to Care.

EATING DISORDERS AWARENESS WEEK ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA SEMAINE DE LA SENSIBILISATION AUX TROUBLES DE L'ALIMENTATION

Mr. Thibeault moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 189, An Act to proclaim Eating Disorders Awareness Week / Projet de loi 189, Loi proclamant la Semaine de la sensibilisation aux troubles de l'alimentation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce first reading of this bill, the Eating Disorders Awareness Week Act. This bill proclaims the week beginning February 1 in each year as Eating Disorders Awareness Week and will help Ontarians learn more about eating disorders and bring light to a very important subject.

1520

SAFE TEXTING ZONES ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DE HALTES TEXTO SÉCURITAIRES

Mr. Fedeli moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 190, An Act governing the designation and use of texting zones / Projet de loi 190, Loi régissant la désignation et l'utilisation des haltes texto.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The Safe Texting Zones Act, 2016: The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act to authorize the Minister of Transportation to designate any part of the King's Highway as a texting zone. A texting zone is an area where a driver is able to park or stop safely to use a hand-held wireless communication device.

The bill also amends the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to authorize the Lieutenant Governor in Council to designate a commuter parking lot or transit station or rest service or other area as a texting zone and to require that signs be displayed at or approaching the texting zone.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

The government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 36, 37, 40 and 41 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader moves that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 36, 37, 40 and 41 be waived. Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Patrick Brown: It is my honour to rise today to introduce a petition from my riding of Simcoe North of 15,725 residents, 343 from Beausoleil First Nation, who are outraged about the cuts to Georgian Bay General. I'll read the petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Georgian Bay General Hospital [GBGH] in Midland, Ontario, services the rural communities of Midland, Penetanguishene, Tiny township, Tay township, Beausoleil First Nation of Christian Island and one of the two largest Métis populations of Ontario. If the recommended cuts to GBGH are implemented, they will cause a severe deterioration to the health care of women, children, underprivileged women, indigenous peoples, francophones, as well as our permanent and seasonal residents. These cuts do not simply impose an inconvenience. These cuts will contribute to serious health outcomes including deaths.

"We, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrical and gynecological units open at Georgian Bay General Hospital [GBGH], Midland, Ontario, and we request that the decision to close the pediatric surgical services, emergency endoscopes, and the downgrading of our critical care ICU beds at GBGH be reversed."

I have to say that I completely and unequivocally agree with the petition. I affix my signature and I will pass it to the page.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have hundreds of names that were collected by Nicole Beaulieu from the Sudbury Workers Education and Advocacy Centre at a rally we held in Sudbury on Friday. It reads as follows:

"Fight for \$15 and Fairness.

"Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are concerned about the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

"Whereas too many workers are not protected by the minimum standards outlined in existing employment and labour laws; and

"Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to "implement a decent work agenda by making sure that Ontario's labour and employment laws:

"—require all workers be paid a uniform, provincial minimum wage...;

"—promote full-time, permanent work...;

"—ensure part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same pay and benefits as their full-time permanent counterparts;

“—provide at least seven (7) days of paid sick leave each year;

“—support job security for workers...;

“—prevent employers from downloading their responsibilities for minimum standards onto temp agencies...;

“—extend minimum protections to all workers...;

“—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

“—offer proactive enforcement of laws...;

“—make it easier for workers to join unions; and

“—require a \$15 minimum wage for all workers.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Madeline to bring it to the Clerk.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario entitled “Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water.” I’d like to thank Dr. Lisa Bentley from Mississauga—and many, many others—for sending it down to the Legislature. It reads as follows:

“Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

“Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

“Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

“Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario.”

Speaker, I’m pleased to sign and support this petition and to send it down with page Zachary.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition was collected over the weekend at the Bolton home show.

“Whereas the Minister of Children and Youth Services announced on March 29th that children with autism over

five years old will be ineligible to receive intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) therapy; and

“Whereas in 2014-15 there were 16,158 children with autism on the wait-list for IBI and applied behavioural analysis (ABA) therapy; and

“Whereas approximately 3,500 children with autism that are on the wait-list or currently receiving therapy in Ontario will be ineligible to receive IBI therapy as a result of the minister’s decision; and

“Whereas children over the age of five still respond to therapy and IBI remains their best shot at learning to communicate with the world around them and developing a degree of independence;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“That the Minister of Children and Youth Services reverse her decision and allow children over five years old to have access to IBI therapy.”

I support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Maya to take to the table.

ONTARIO MUNICIPAL BOARD

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “Whereas the Ontario Municipal Board is a provincial agency composed of unelected members unaccountable to Ontarians; and

“Whereas the Ontario Municipal Board has the power to unilaterally alter local development decisions made by municipalities and their communities; and

“Whereas the city of Toronto is the largest city in Ontario; and

“Whereas the city of Toronto has a planning department composed of professional planners, an extensive legal department and 44 full-time city councillors directly elected by its citizens; and

“Whereas Toronto’s city council voted overwhelmingly in February 2012 to request an exemption from the Ontario Municipal Board’s jurisdiction;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize the ability of the city of Toronto to handle its own urban planning and development; and

“Further, that the Ontario Municipal Board no longer have jurisdiction over the city of Toronto.”

I’m going to affix my name, along with the names of many councillors, and I’m going to give it to Joshua to be delivered to the table.

1530

TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: « À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Attendu qu’il y a un besoin criant en infrastructure de transport routier dans la province de l’Ontario;

« Attendu que d’offrir différentes alternatives ou options dans le choix du mode de transport aux citoyens aide à réduire le nombre de voitures sur les routes;

« Attendu que les transports en commun contribuent à améliorer la qualité de vie des Ontariens ainsi qu'à préserver l'environnement;

« Attendu que les résidents d'Orléans et de l'est d'Ottawa ont besoin d'une plus grande infrastructure de transport;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Soutenir le plan Faire progresser l'Ontario et la construction de la phase II du train léger sur rail (TLR), ce qui contribuera à répondre aux besoins criants en infrastructure de transport à Orléans, à l'est d'Ottawa et à travers la province. »

Il me fait plaisir de signer cette pétition et de la remettre au page Zachary.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I will affix my signature and give it to page Aarbbi.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition that continues to flow into my office on a regular basis.

"Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

I couldn't agree with this more, Speaker. I'm going to give it to page Deanna to bring to the Clerk.

CAREGIVERS

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are over 2.6 million caregivers to a family member, a friend or a neighbour in Ontario;

"Whereas these caregivers work hard to provide care to those that are most in need even though their efforts are often overlooked;

"Whereas one third of informal caregivers are distressed, which is twice as many as four years ago;

"Whereas without these caregivers, the health care system and patients would greatly suffer in Ontario;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP Gélinas's bill to proclaim the first Tuesday of every April as Family Caregiver Day to increase recognition and awareness of family caregivers in Ontario."

I support the petition. I'll give the petition to page Khushali.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Rick Nicholls: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"The recent decision by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services to put an end to funding for sheltered workshops and special employment services for people with special needs in Ontario. Community Living Chatham-Kent now supports 475 people and their families and employs more than 250 people. The Ministry of Community and Social Services provides 90% of the funding with the remainder coming from donations, fundraising activities, grants and foundations.

"We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens who urge our leaders to act now and put a stop to this decision

and reinstate the funding and programs to their previous state.”

I approve of this petition. I sign it and give it to Amelia.

CARDIAC CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was sent to me by Mr. Tim Holman. He’s the executive director of the Ontario Association of Cardiologists. It reads as follows:

“Whereas heart disease is the #1 killer of Ontarians;

“Whereas congestive heart failure is the single commonest reason a patient goes to a hospital emergency room for treatment and the single commonest diagnosis for hospital admissions in Ontario;

“Whereas Ontario’s cardiologists save lives 24/7 every day and improve the lives of thousands of patients with heart disease by providing accessible, efficient and cost-effective community-based cardiac services;

“Whereas the Ontario government’s February 2015 and October 2015 unilateral changes to the schedule of benefits for physician services under the Health Insurance Act is resulting in a deterioration of these services thereby reducing patient access to cardiac care; expanding wait-lists for cardiac services; and increasing preventable cardiac deaths;

“Whereas the Ontario Association of Cardiologists has presented alternatives, such as the congestive heart failure regional hubs initiative, to the Ontario government that would save lives and improve cardiac care service delivery in the province cost-effectively;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Direct the Ontario government to repeal its unilateral changes to the schedule of benefits for physician services and instruct the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to work directly with the Ontario Association of Cardiologists to develop and implement cost-effective cardiac care public policies aimed at addressing the #1 killer of Ontarians so patient access to cardiac services in the future will not be compromised.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Barton to bring it to the Clerk.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Todd Smith: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads:

“Whereas demonstration schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs;

“Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstration schools and other special education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

“Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstration schools and other essential support services;

“Whereas freezing student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind; and

“Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstration schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential.”

I agree with this, will sign it, and send it to the table with page Cooper.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

“(2) Return to the bargaining table with the OMA (Ontario Medical Association) to resume negotiations for a fair physician services agreement;

“(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Ontario.”

I sign this petition and give it to page Barton to deliver.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 172, An Act respecting greenhouse gas, the Standing Committee on General Government be authorized to meet for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill on Monday, May 2, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m., and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.; Tuesday, May 3, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m., and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and Wednesday, May 4, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m., and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., and 6:45 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.; and Thursday, May 5, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m., and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and

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“That only those amendments to the bill which were filed with the Clerk of the Committee by 8:59 a.m. on Thursday, May 5, 2016, shall be considered; and

“That at 9 a.m. on Thursday, May 5, 2016, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. At this time, the Chair shall

allow one 20-minute waiting period, pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

“That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Monday, May 9, 2016. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

“That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on General Government, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called that same day; and

“The vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

“That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Community and Social Services has moved notice of motion 64. Minister?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Bill 172 is an important and necessary piece of legislation in the battle to effectively combat climate change. Right now, the PCs are thoughtlessly stalling it in committee. The official opposition needs to recognize the urgency of the problem we're facing:

—The United Nations reported that 2015 was the hottest year on record.

—By 2050, southern Ontario's climate will start feeling more like the southern United States.

—By 2030, winter temperatures in the Far North are predicted to rise by as much as eight degrees.

Mr. Speaker, we have an important window of opportunity open to us to effectively deal with climate change, yet the PCs are intent on slamming it shut. There is a broad consensus that carbon pricing, such as the cap-and-trade system, is a key tool for reducing greenhouse gases and driving a prosperous, low-carbon, high-productivity economy.

Ontario's cap-and-trade program is proposed to begin January 1, 2017, with the first auctions for emission allowances beginning in March 2017, but in order for this to occur, Ontario must have its cap-and-trade regulation in place by June 1, 2016. That's why it is essential that this bill move through committee. Now, this isn't to say that debate is not welcomed. That's exactly why we've proposed more than 25 hours of committee time on this motion. But we have to keep this bill moving forward in order to start tackling climate change as soon as possible.

I was quite encouraged when I heard that the Leader of the Opposition had seen the light on climate change. It appears that the rest of his caucus, as we're seeing today, have their eyes closed. As of today, the general government committee has sat for 10 hours for the purpose of clause-by-clause voting, and the PCs have used every stall tactic in the book to prevent the bill from moving forward. In the first week, the committee spent a third of its time in recesses called by the PCs. Queen's Park Briefing has said the PCs are “filibustering and making

the process as painful as possible.” The member from Huron–Bruce even started reading her own quotes into the record.

I'd like to thank the NDP for working with the government on this very important piece of legislation, specifically the member for Toronto–Danforth. In fact, when I was parliamentary assistant to a former Minister of the Environment, Mr. John Wilkinson, the member from Toronto–Danforth was very helpful in passing that enabling legislation. In our consultation and amendment process, we have seen the NDP's dedication to moving forward on stopping climate change.

We just wish we could say the same thing about the PC caucus. We cannot allow backward opinions to hold us back. Time allocation was not our first choice, but it is the only choice we have left to ensure we can start tackling climate change today. I urge all members in this House to support this motion and help pass this bill as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to say that it's a pleasure to join the debate on another closure motion from this Liberal government.

I can't tell you, after the proceedings that we had prior to question period this morning, just how ironic it is that we're discussing time allocation again here today. There would be previous members rolling over in their graves today, because we're debating another time allocation motion. The reason that we are debating the time allocation motion isn't because of anything that that minister just said; the fact that we're debating this today is because these guys want us to pass a flawed piece of legislation again, and we're not going to do it.

You know, it's not surprising that the government finds democracy inconvenient, because that's what this is. We've had a near-record use of time allocation by this government in this Parliament. It's no longer a tool that's used sparingly to expedite emergency measures. It's not supposed to be used to shut down debate. It's not supposed to be used to pass almost every piece of government legislation.

I know what the members opposite are going to say. They'll say that climate change—and we just heard it—is a major concern for governments around the world, and, indeed, it is. They'll say that Canada and Ontario need to do our part, and, indeed, we do. But they won't address the negligent amount of work that actually went into this bill, and it was, at best, another lacklustre effort by the minister to ram a piece of legislation through that, while obviously well-intentioned, again, is drastically flawed.

The government is introducing with this bill one of the largest and most complex taxation schemes devised in the history of fiscal policy. All this, the government already knows. The government knows that where these systems are in place they've been prone to multi-billion-dollar fraud schemes, and the government knows that when opposition critics were briefed on this bill, they were told that the ministry had no idea how many people

would be needed in order to enforce and administer this system. But no problem; we should just pass it as quickly as we can possibly can anyway.

I can't tell you—and this is sarcasm—what a comfort it is to the opposition to hear that the government is introducing a scheme that, when it has been implemented elsewhere, is prone to massive fraud, and it has no idea how many people it's going to need to enforce and administer it.

In retrospect, I'm nothing short of shocked that the government wasn't given exactly what they want when it comes to this bill. After all, if it isn't the responsibility of the opposition to simply hand the government a blank cheque for a massive new taxation scheme that's prone to fraud, without the necessary oversight to ensure taxpayers aren't ripped off, well, what exactly is the responsibility of the opposition, Mr. Speaker?

Then the government recognized that they had put a laughably minimal amount of work into their legislation, and they tried to correct their mistake with about 70 amendments—70; seven zero. In the almost five years that I've been in the House, I've only once seen a government bill subject to as many as amendments as this one. That's how unprecedented it is that the government would seek not just to amend the bill at committee, but fundamentally rewrite a bill that will bear no resemblance to the bill that left the House to go to committee in the first place.

Try to conceive how unbelievable this process actually is. This government managed to take one of the most important legislative initiatives of the session and totally botch it at second reading to the point where bureaucrats had to inform opposition members that they had no idea how it would be administered or enforced. Then, rather than go back and do it again so that we don't end up with Dr. Frankenstein's monster trying to regulate carbon output while taxing consumers—doing neither of those two things well and being taken advantage of by people who want to manipulate the system—the government's solution was to bring 70 bolts to committee to attempt to tighten the monster's neck.

Basically, the government showed up, like the kid who did their homework on the morning school bus ride, and complained when members of the opposition parties told them that they had to do it again. Now, there are members of the third party who will say that we're simply taking a different approach than they are, and that's true. They believe that they can tighten the bolts in the monster's neck. They believe that the kid who showed up with the homework they did on the school bus shouldn't have to learn how to do it better.

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Fundamentally, I don't trust any bill that this government is going to bring forward. Somebody always ends up paying a price that they didn't see coming, no matter how well-intentioned the bill is. Somebody always ends up getting a free ride because they wrote the right op-ed or they showed up at the Hyatt on the right night. Somebody always ends up getting a \$100 hydro bill who never used hydro that much.

When the government wants to remove the oversight of the Financial Accountability Officer from a \$1.9-billion pot of government money, you're right: We're a little bit skeptical on this side of the House. When there's no transparency on who's getting investments from that \$1.9-billion fund, I get a little more skeptical. After all, this government just collected \$400,000 in campaign contributions from companies that they gave subsidies to. When the Financial Accountability Officer comes out and says that he's concerned by the lack of government transparency when it comes to cap-and-trade, I'm concerned because I was here for the Ornge scandal, and I was here for the gas plant scandal as well.

We will be subject to an endless parade of government members this afternoon, getting to their feet and telling us how awful climate change is and how they're the only ones doing anything about it. They'll get up and tell us that it must be done immediately—

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: What about the 407?

Mr. Todd Smith: The member from Barrie is heckling me, Mr. Speaker, and she doesn't know what she's talking about.

No, it has to be done right. The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke stands up in this House often and says, "A good carpenter has a saying: measure twice and cut once." He says it all the time. What the government is doing here is, the minister is putting forward Bill 172 with a blindfold and a chainsaw on. He's not getting it right. That's the duty of the opposition. Some members on the other side don't understand that, but we do have a duty to make sure that a bill is as good as it can possibly be, and this bill is far from that.

Rather than debate the amendments in committee, rather than rethink the bill and perhaps reintroduce something with fewer holes than the Ottawa Senators' goaltending, we have a minister that strolls through the press gallery and vehemently and publicly voices his objections to legitimate democratic opposition. I respectfully submit that if the minister had just done his job right the first time, he might find there was a little less opposition to be found. But no; the minister asserts that the problem isn't his work; it isn't his lack of detail or lack of transparency; it's the fact that other members of the House are objecting to his poor work and to the lack of detail and lack of transparency in the bill.

So I say to the government: On the basic tenets here, we're not so far apart. We agree that climate change is a major issue and that something has to be done to combat it. But this is a considerable shift in fiscal policy. It requires a considerable amount of detail and transparency that must be available to the public. Ontarians deserve to know how much is being collected and where it's going. They deserve to know that the non-partisan officers of the Legislature are able to report on how the government is spending their money.

It's also my opinion that if we're going to assert that polluters, and not consumers, are the problem, then it's polluters and not consumers who should pay. I know that on that, the minister and I disagree. I believe that this

regime should be revenue-neutral, because if it isn't, it has the potential to have an economically crippling impact on working-class people in Ontario. I believe that a problem caused by polluters isn't solved by endlessly taxing consumers.

I'm not going to change Bill 172 to include that; I realize that. The Ontario people would have to change government in order to include that, and that option, unfortunately, isn't currently available. But I can, as a member of the opposition and as a representative of people, expect and, in fact, demand that the government do better work than we've seen on Bill 172 to this point.

I also want to offer a final cautionary note against the continual and seemingly permanent use of time allocation on government legislation. At some point, people are forced to conclude that this government simply has no interest in what people of certain ridings have to say. At some point, the government is stating that it believes that the House and the committee process exist only to rubber-stamp the government agenda. That's not why I was sent here. The member from Barrie may have drunk the Kool-Aid, but we were brought here to represent our constituents and point out the problems with government legislation. Or, perhaps, as we heard this morning, the Liberals just don't want to work and that's why they're pushing through legislation as quickly as they can, no matter how many flaws that piece of legislation may have.

Don't drink the Kool-Aid. Look at the legislation, find out where the money is being spent and if it's being spent properly, and stop this time allocation nonsense.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I don't rise with any great pleasure to discuss this motion; I don't at all. My experience in this House with time allocation has not been a happy experience. This government has used it time and time again to jam through bills, to end critical debate and put us in a situation where public consultation and legislative debate has been profoundly limited. In fact, in the past year, I've seen more time allocation and limitation on debate than I've seen in all the rest of my 10 years here. It's hard for me to believe that Dalton McGuinty was more open to debate than the current government, but that, frankly, is the record. If in fact time allocation had been used far more sparingly, then one could see, occasionally, that its use, where it was absolutely necessary, would be feasible to justify. It is very difficult to justify time allocation given this government's habits with time-allocating a bill, really, on almost a whim.

Speaker, others may speak to the time allocation itself; I'm going to speak to the issues at hand with regard to the bill that we are considering in committee. I have to say that the consideration is proceeding at a glacial rate, without a doubt.

The bill under consideration, Bill 172, puts in place a cap-and-trade system for the province of Ontario and has some other pieces in that bill that will assist the govern-

ment—not just this one, but any government elected in Ontario—to move forward on taking action on climate change. Fair enough.

In committee, the NDP has been pushing for a number of things that need to be in this bill. We have said all along that there needed to be fairness; there needed to be transparency; there needed to be effectiveness. If you look at fairness, there's no question in my mind that this bill should be allocating a substantial piece of the revenue that comes from cap-and-trade to helping low-income households, northern households and rural households to make the adjustments they're going to have to make. In California, 25% of the revenue that comes from cap-and-trade is allocated to low-income households. I think that's fair. I think people whose income is low need to be at the top of the list for the retrofitting of their houses and for the changes in their energy needs, so that they don't get hit by the higher prices and so that that hit is cut dramatically.

This government has agreed to some amendments—and I appreciate the fact that they've agreed to some—but has not made the commitment to follow California's lead in making a very substantial commitment to low-income households. When you look at the reality in northern Ontario, where today and for the next few decades it will be substantially cooler than southern Ontario, there should be an allocation to help those households and those families proceed far more quickly to retrofit their homes and cut their bills.

In northern Ontario—and I'm sure there are a few here who can speak to this—the government's cuts to the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission have been brutal and devastating.

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They have left the north without the kind of transit by bus and rail that provides an alternative for people in the south when they don't want to drive their cars. What this government has done is cut the supports to northern Ontario and then said, "On top of that, we're going to tell you that you have to pay more for transportation"—not at all reasonable or fair, and something that should be addressed for equity, for quality and really for that sense of fairness that people should have about government initiatives. That's a substantial problem.

We are very worried about transparency. Those parts of the bill—the most critical parts are to come. One of the things we asked for and were able to get was a transformation. As the bill was originally written, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change would only have to report every five years on what is actually going on in terms of their climate plan; it now will be on an annual basis. That is a step forward, and I'm appreciative of that.

But I have to say that the way the greenhouse gas reduction account has been set up in this bill, and the limitations on access by the Financial Accountability Officer, is profoundly worrying. People don't have to look very far. If we look to Quebec and the use of the green funds in Quebec, the allocation from the green

funds to build an oil pipeline in eastern Quebec said to me that this funding is being used totally improperly. The use of those funds to fix the tail assembly on an Air Canada jet: again, totally indefensible.

Speaker, in order to avoid that kind of playing around with the money, when the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change makes a recommendation as to whether or not to proceed with a particular project, it has to be open and transparent. The criteria have to be clear, and the reporting and evaluation by the minister have to be clear as well.

Right now, as the bill is written, I'm not seeing the transparency, openness and accountability that will be needed to ensure that those funds are spent properly, and so that the government of the day—of any day—is held accountable. Those are very profound matters for us.

The last piece I want to address is effectiveness. There are concerns, first of all, about the fact that this government was not willing to put into the bill the climate targets that were incorporated into the Paris agreements on climate, decided on in December. I would say that that would be fundamental. We had a global debate—a global congress of parties—and they came to a formulation that everyone could live with and Canada said it is in favour of. Now this province is out of sync with Canada and the global community. Why on earth would we take that position?

The targets for cutting our greenhouse gas emissions are very, very meek. When we look at what is happening in Europe, they have set targets over the next few decades that are meant to ensure that the whole of the European Union comes to some common goal. But within that European Union, different states have more ambitious targets. The UK has a target of 55% reductions—55%—by 2030. Denmark is 50% by 2020. What's happening in that union is that the countries that are industrially more developed and better off are taking on more aggressive targets so that the poorer, less developed countries will not have to push as far; frankly, they wouldn't be able to push as far.

We here in Ontario are taking on, really, not quite the targets that the European Union as a whole is taking on. If we're actually going to get to a world that avoids catastrophic climate change, we have to be far more ambitious than we are. This bill, as currently written and as currently modified in committee, doesn't take on those aggressive targets. It is not the bill that's going to be needed to actually meet the UN target to meet the targets set at COP21. That's a huge problem.

In terms of the techniques and platforms that are going to be used, which are set out at the end of the bill, there are changes that have to be put in there that, so far, I haven't seen the government indicating an interest in. So this bill still needs substantial modification for fairness, transparency and effectiveness.

I have to say to you, Speaker, that we are in a very tough spot as a society. We have let 25 years go by since the discussion in the early 1990s, when it was realized that there had to be very substantial, concerted global

action to cut greenhouse gas emissions. They've gone up 60% around the world. So the space, the opportunity, to actually avoid a catastrophic impact has shrunk dramatically, and to the extent that we haven't recognized it, that we don't recognize it in our legislation and actions, we leave huge problems for the generations coming after us.

Frankly, given the rate at which change is happening in the world now—and I think the minister referenced this at the beginning of her remarks: the hottest year on record in 2015. If you look at the temperature increases this year, they are in a whole other area, in January, February and March, than we have seen for decades.

In the past, people said, "We want to do this for our children and our grandchildren." I think, Speaker, that you and me and everyone in this chamber are going to get to see very dramatic and unpleasant changes in our lifetime. We aren't going to be in a position where, unethically, we're leaving it for the next generations. We're going to have to come to grips with it on our own.

I believe this bill does have to be modified. I believe that action has to be taken. I have to say I am not at all happy with time allocation, given what this government's record has been on time-allocating the agenda in this Legislature on an ongoing basis, ignoring, frankly, what's needed in a democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak for the next 10 minutes—

Mr. Todd Smith: Nine minutes and 15 seconds.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Nine minutes and 15 seconds; thank you.

Speaker, we heard from the minister earlier why they wanted to have this speed in getting this bill time-allocated. But I can tell you that the real reason why they're in such a hurry to get this bill done is because they cannot wait—they simply cannot wait—to get their hands on your money. I'm going to talk a little bit about the real reason that Bill 172 is here.

We would acknowledge that climate change is indeed a very serious challenge that requires a credible plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while protecting the taxpayer and our economy. But we are very concerned that this government will take advantage of the goodwill that the people have shown in respect to climate change. They're going to take advantage of that goodwill and use it as another opportunity to raid their pocketbooks.

I can tell you that there is \$1.9 billion a year that will come out of the cap-and-trade fund that they continue to tell the public will be used to help lower greenhouse gases. But let me take you on a small tour through their own documents, which will illustrate to you that that indeed is not what they're using the money for.

The fall economic statement was the first chance we had to see the depth of money that we're talking about. Back then, it quoted \$1.6 billion being available, but they showed it going right into revenue. That was amazing. It counters everything that they claim this money is for. This was shown right into revenue.

In fact, I'll quote from the National Post, November 27: "The document also reveals for the first time how much money the government hopes to raise from a new cap-and-trade scheme that will be phased in in 2016." At that time, of course, we were with the old numbers. They went on to say: "It expects to raise \$300 million that year and \$1.3 billion the next." That, of course, is from the National Post.

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That's on pages 106 and 107 of the fall economic statement. Let me read you the wording that went along with that, because it says: "A preliminary estimate of the revenues that are expected to arise from the auctioning of cap-and-trade allowances" is \$1.6 billion. Only four months later, in the actual 2016 budget, not only did the number rise to \$1.9 billion, but again, it went directly into revenue.

Now, they would be very quick to tell you: "Well, of course. We take that money in, and then we're going to spend it on greenhouse gas emissions." So when the actual bill was tabled—and they did the same trick with the Hydro One sale, on Bill 144. If you look—it's a 67-page bill—on page 65 of that, right down at the bottom on the inside corner is one sentence of Bill 144 that said they can use that money to reimburse themselves for money already spent on transit and infrastructure. That is exactly what's in this bill. That's why they want to rush this bill through. That's why they want closure: so that I can't stand here and we all can't stand here and tell the public about the real facts.

If you look at Bill 172 and you look at page 44 or 45, I believe, you will find—it's a 56-page bill. If you look at section 68—remember that number, Speaker, section 68, because I'm going to talk about it again in a couple of minutes—it says, under "Authorized expenditures," that that money from the cap-and-trade fund can be used "to fund, directly or indirectly, costs ... described in schedule 1...." So then you flip to the last page of the book, page 56, and you'll see schedule 1. It tells you that you can use the money to pay for active transportation infrastructure. That's public transit vehicles and infrastructure. They list that.

Then it sends you back to yet another chapter, and that's where the magic words are. So you can see that it's a big shell; it's a big circle. You have to go from A to B to C, all through these things, but all it gets to, again, are a few words, one sentence that tells you, in subsection 3 of section 68 on page 47: the money can be used "to reimburse the crown for expenditures ... directly or indirectly" related to the items that I already mentioned.

Here we go again. It's a shell game. They take your money. They tell you that they will buy items that will reduce greenhouse gases, such as public transit vehicles and infrastructure, and then, lo and behold, they put that money in the fund and they're allowed to pay for items that they already budgeted for. That \$130 billion that the Premier announced in 2014 and again in 2015? This \$130 billion is exactly what they can spend this money on. They gave themselves a little loophole—one tiny, little

sentence that tells you that that's the real purpose. All of this is so that they can artificially balance their deficit, balance their budget by 2017-18.

All of the documents that we have—the public accounts, fall economic statement, their budget—show that they cannot balance without that extra revenue. They need the revenue from Hydro One. They can't hide from it anymore. It's been proven now that they're using the Hydro One revenue. Now, by using that exact same sentence, they can use that cap-and-trade money to reimburse money they were already going to be spending on transit vehicles and infrastructure. That's an absolute fact now.

It's funny. We revealed this a couple of weeks ago, and to give it a little credence and a little credibility, the Financial Accountability Officer took it upon himself—he was not asked to; he was not compelled to—to go to the committee hearings on Bill 172 and brought up exactly the same fact. He said, on section 68, the section I referred to, that it "may hinder" his "ability to provide you and your fellow members with information on the fiscal impacts of the act ... there could be a case where even if revenues do match expenses there could be an impact on the surplus or deficit of the province. This would occur if some of the expenses were not on new initiatives but were tied to previously planned expenses."

The Financial Accountability Officer figured it out; it didn't take him very long. It didn't take our caucus very long to figure out as well that just as they did with the Hydro One sale, they had a little clause to allow them quietly to use the money for things they had already budgeted for and use that money that they had already budgeted to lower the deficit. They've done it with Hydro One, and now they're doing it with cap-and-trade.

That is what this charade is all about. They don't want us standing here talking about the fact that they're preying on the goodwill of the public, who want to genuinely do something about the serious issue of climate change. They're preying on the public to use that as a guise to pay off their deficit, which we all know was accumulated by waste, mismanagement and scandal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Time allocation once again in this House. Speaker, thinking about this time allocation reminded me of years ago, when I was in the electrical trade. There was one particular journeyman who was very vindictive, very obtuse and very belligerent. Whenever an apprentice would come to that journeyman, when he was asked to do something, and ask why, that journeyman would say, "Don't think about it; just do it."

When I was listening to the Liberals here today on time allocation, that came to my mind. When the Premier said to the Minister of Community and Social Services, "Put in a time allocation motion," she might have asked why, and the response would have been, "Don't think about it; just do it."

Every time everybody else on the Liberal side might ask the Premier's office why, she just says, "Don't think

about it; just do it.” No guts, no gonads. She knows there’s no guts and no gonads. She knows they’ll just do it.

The Minister of the Environment was complaining earlier this week about the opposition taking 20-minute recesses in committee to study the bill before they voted. He was complaining that we were taking time to think about something before we voted on it. The government had over 70 amendments to this bill. He said they were highly detailed, very intricate and very technical, and there was over 70 of them. But, like the Premier, he told everybody on the Liberal side, “Don’t ask why. Don’t think; just do it. Just vote for them.”

That doesn’t apply to this side.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I know you just can’t help yourself, but that’s the fourth time—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Stop the clock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock. Thank you for that to the member from Lanark.

I’ve been trying to be kind and tried to say it off the record, and you just aren’t listening. You keep biting on the lure.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Predator.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Predator, whatever. Can we cut it back a bit? Thanks. Start the clock.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. The member from Ottawa–Orléans would be one of those: “Don’t think about it; just do it.” She would accept that willingly.

But we don’t accept that on this side of the House. When the government proposes a highly technical and detailed amendment that wasn’t debated in this House—wasn’t discussed—we like to take our time and think about it before we vote on it—a terrible, terrible attitude that the Minister of the Environment has about taking our time and thinking about it. It’s important.

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Later today, we’re going to be speaking to Bill 156, on the Payday Loans Act, and there’s another good example. That bill is back before the House. It came to the House first in 2008; then it came back in 2009 for amendments; then it came back in 2010 for further amendments; then it came back in 2011 for further amendments, because the Liberal government just did it without thinking. They want to do the same thing with this cap-and-trade bill: “Just do it; don’t think about it.” That’s not going to happen on this side of the House, Speaker.

I want to just take a few moments to reiterate to the Liberal members who are still awake and who aren’t doing their crossword puzzles or Sudokus this afternoon that public debate in this House is not just for fun and it’s not just for entertainment. It does have value. Debate is to safeguard the public’s interest. When we develop laws or policies, debate is to protect the public’s interest. But it not only protects the public interest; it also provides guidance to our administrators of law; it gives guidance to politicians; it gives guidance and understanding to the

public about what this law or policy fully entails. It gives people an understanding and a comprehension of what the policy and the law are. That’s what debate is for.

When you stifle debate, when you kill debate, you create ignorance. You create ignorance for our administrators, you create ignorance for our politicians, and you create ignorance within the public at large. There’s an old adage that says, “Ignorance is no excuse in the eyes of the law.” That’s what public debate does: It satisfies that adage. It takes away that ignorance and supplants it with knowledge.

Time allocation is the exact contradiction. It creates ignorance for everyone. This government—I do know that there are a lot of good members on that side of the House. It must be frustrating. It must be hurtful to be treated in the fashion that they are by the Premier, when they say, “Just kill debate. Create ignorance and create confusion because she says so. Don’t think about it.”

I know that the Minister of Northern Development and Mines is here. This has to hurt him, to see time allocation once again.

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I know the member from Ottawa–Orléans thinks it’s funny to cancel debate. She’s laughing. The member from Ottawa–Orléans is laughing about safeguarding the public interest. That’s pretty low. That is disturbing, Speaker, for a member in this House not to understand the role of themselves, to understand the role of others and to laugh at time allocation.

Speaker, we have seen time and time again that these Liberal members—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock.

I don’t understand—you can sit there for a minute—why members have to yell across nine seats when they can go and sit beside the member and discuss quietly their objections or their unhappiness about what’s going on. I really don’t like it when people yell across several empty seats to convey their message, and I’m going to start calling people on that.

I also have given you, the member from Ottawa–Orléans, lots of leverage, lots of kind—

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Leeway.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I’ll take care of it, thank you.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It can’t be leverage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, I don’t know how I ever got through school without the English major beside me. I really don’t. Thank you again for your input.

Please, I don’t know how many times I have to ask you without taking it to the next step, okay? You’re at the edge. The member from Davenport has been quite active; I’ve left her alone—very verbal; I’ve left her alone—but she’s getting a little bit over the limit. Thank you.

Any further discussions will be closer in proximity and talking quietly. Thank you.

Start the clock. Continue.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker.

Not only are they stifling debate in this House, but what they're really doing is closing the door on the people of Ontario. They're closing the door. They're slamming the door shut. They're saying, "We don't want to hear from you. We're not going to hear from you in this committee." Every government amendment will be deemed to be passed. There will be no more discussion. There will be no more time to think about these technical amendments before a vote is cast. All the votes will be done at once and then it will be passed.

Minister, you've got to know that that is wrong. I can see it in your eyes that you know that is wrong. I just don't understand why you don't have the fortitude and the resolve to stand up and say, "I'm going to think first. I'm going to think first before I do what I'm told to do by the Premier's office."

Wouldn't it be nice if we had legislators in this building on the government side who said, "I'm going to stand up and I'm going to think before I do it. I'm not just going to roll over and allow the Premier to bully me into not being an elected representative and representing my constituents"? But as we see, nobody on the Liberal side will even stand up and try to defend this indefensible action.

They have 40 minutes to engage in debate. The Minister of Community and Social Services, who is a good and honourable woman—it must have pained her to have to stand up and bring in this time allocation motion. I know that she has an interest in democracy. I know she has compassion for democracy. It must have hurt to bring in this time allocation motion. But I see that, after a couple of minutes of introducing this motion, she left the House and left it to others. She probably couldn't bear to stand the—

Mr. Arthur Potts: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): We have a point of order from the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm quite certain you'll rule favourably that the member is referencing the absence of a member in the House, which is contrary to the rules.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): That is correct. Unfortunately, I was being distracted by one of your members and I didn't catch it. It's hard to maintain everything that's going on.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Oh, come on, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't need any comments from the member from Brampton West either.

Continue.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker.

This government is addicted to time allocation. They talk about wanting to have a conversation, but then they bring in time allocation. They are talking out of both sides of the mouth. You can't say, "We want to have dialogue and conversation and debate," and then bring in a time allocation motion. One of those two things is not truthful.

But these guys are always addicted to time allocation. As we know with every addiction, the first thing is to recognize, to look in that mirror and say, "Yes, I have a problem." That's the only way you can confront your addiction, your problem: to look in the mirror and see what it is that you're doing.

I do hope that the Liberals, instead of looking at their BlackBerrys like the member from Northumberland, will maybe look in the mirror and say, "What is it that we're doing wrong?" In the morning, they'll get up and say, "I'm going to stand up. I'm going to be a legislator. I'm going to represent my constituents and I will vote against time allocation every time it comes before this House."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

1630

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to rise to debate this motion for time allocation. Because if ever there was a reason for time allocation, the members of the official opposition party have been giving it to us on exactly this bill, Bill 172. It's as if they can't be trusted with full and open debate, because what they characterize as full and open debate is asking ridiculously miniscule questions on technical amendments and then asking to bring up legal counsel and specialists from the government, getting the legal counsel for the committee to come forward and give explanations on a technical amendment which might reflect on the French language translation of one word in the bill.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: After they had a briefing.

Mr. Arthur Potts: And after they had a briefing; thank you. That's absolutely correct.

Then, as if not—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): While I believe the member from Lanark—I did stand up and ask them to be quiet while you were speaking. It appears the rules changed somehow, and now you're doing what they were doing. So I would ask you to sit down and I would ask you to please cut it back a bit. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. It's an unbelievably frustrating experience to go through all of that wasted time talking about a very simple technical—at which point they call for a 20-minute recess as soon as the Chair of the committee calls for a vote. We have had six 20-minute delays—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Do you know how many you asked for in the gas plant scandal?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nipissing.

Mr. Arthur Potts: We have had no end of repetitive, tedious, off-topic—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm going to look up how many.

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I apologize, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. I'm not a happy camper. I just asked you, and you couldn't resist.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I can't help it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, you'd better. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. I'm delighted that the member who just spoke is making his way down the floor, no doubt staying in the House to listen to my very insightful remarks on the wasteful tactics we've received in committee.

Let's be very clear about the accusations that there are too many amendments from us on this, because we have to time-allocate this because we have in the neighbourhood of about 70 amendments to this bill. We are at best a quarter of the way through after four days of committee—four days of committee. Of those 70 amendments that we've brought forward, at least 50 or 55 are simply technical. But on every single one, the members of the official opposition party drag out the debate ad nauseam. And that's the problem.

Here you had an opportunity to have a good, wholesome debate on issues in front of us so that we can make the bill better—we know that this particular bill, Bill 172, is the most important piece of legislation that we're going to be passing through this session. It's absolutely critical to the future of my children, my children's children—Speaker, to your family and to your family's family. This is an incredibly important piece of legislation that we must get right.

We've had the debate about cap-and-trade being the right direction to go, to be absolutely sure that we get the kinds of carbon savings we need, but they're not satisfied. We get it. They'd rather do a tax-and-dividend scheme, which we know around the world doesn't get GHG savings. We're doing something which we know is right, and they're standing in the way. That's when this motion becomes necessary. It's not as if we're muzzled, as they seem to want to imply. But they've had the opportunity on this bill, and they've blown it.

Now, fortunately, the member on the committee from the third party gets the seriousness of this piece of legislation. But he, who knows so much about this bill, about climate change and about emissions, is silent. He's absolutely silent in these committee hearings, because there's nothing to add in debate from a guy like the member from Toronto—Danforth, who actually knows his stuff really, really well. That's part of the shame: the waste of his time in committee, when he would prefer, I'm sure, to be in the committee next door where they were discussing the waste diversion bill, where he could have also brought expertise and listened to all of the different stakeholders in that piece of legislation. Instead, we sit in endless, mindless and tedious deliberations on the most minuscule of points.

Speaker, that is why it is so important that we find a way forward with this. We're not making the time allocation so tight that we won't have a chance to get through these motions; we're actually giving you lots of time. In fact, I'm prepared to sit until midnight on Wednesdays in order to get this thing through the House, so you'll have the time to debate the critical pieces.

We heard one member talking a bit about some of the issues that they are concerned about. Great; let's have that debate on those sections in the bill when we get to it. This notion that sitting around and just dragging it out so we never get to that section is somehow protecting—

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: One hour on a debate that had no amendment—

Mr. Arthur Potts: One hour on a debate which had—
Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You're even talking to the guy that's speaking on your side. You just can't do it, can you? You just can't. I'm feeling for you now; it's a problem.

All right, continue, with the help of your friend.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Sure. She was helping me, actually, to be perfectly honest. I adore her. As a government whip, she's one of my best friends around here, but she took me right off my train of thought there, Speaker. It's a heck of a good heckle, right? A heck of a good heckle.

So let's debate the issues that concern you in detail. The basic premise of the bill is in place, and let's debate those things.

It's really quite fascinating. There was a question I asked in the House the other day; some questioned whether it was about government policy. But clearly, our government policy is going down this cap-and-trade direction.

It was of a shocking nature to the members of the official opposition—they're against it. They're against the whole climate pricing stage, until one day their new leader comes in and says, post-conference, "Look, we're in favour of climate change now—we're in favour of climate pricing, carbon pricing."

Then it looks like they've completely flipped back again. If we're to believe the critic for the environment in the official opposition, with the opposition that she is bringing forward in delaying this, it's as if they've completely flip-flopped again.

We're interested in getting to debate. We're interested in finishing the discussions on the clause-by-clause and doing it in a respectful time which gives all members of the committee a time to reflect on the very important things that we heard from people as they came forward.

And let's be clear: I sat through all those hearings. Every single person that came forward was absolutely thrilled with what we were doing. There were some tweaks here, some tweaks there. We listened. We listened very carefully. We could have heard from more people, but the members of the opposition insisted on extending the amount of time that people would speak. We couldn't hear as many. That was their decision; it wasn't our decision. We agreed with their request to give people 10 minutes, and we heard them. What we heard in people's 10 minutes is that we're doing the right thing for the right reasons. It's an aggressive plan; it's a complicated plan; but it is the right plan.

I do sincerely hope that we won't have to drag this thing out ad nauseam, that the members will actually come to the table to do the debate necessary on the

amendments in front of us, and that they will do that shortly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I've had the pleasure, I guess, of sitting in on this committee for some time now. I've sat in on a number of bills, and I've never seen a government bill come through with 70 amendments.

He talked about the deputations and having people come all the way to Toronto from all over Canada, mostly Ontario. And 10 minutes is too long to talk? I don't know what they're talking about. I've seen committees where they wanted to have three minutes of discussion. They cut our questions back to three minutes. This government clearly doesn't want to hear.

And for him to say that everybody was in favour of this bill is quite a stretch, especially when you look at the Financial Accountability Officer, who had some major issues with it and how he was being shielded from actually being able to comment on where they were spending the money. If this government was as transparent as they say they are, they shouldn't be shielding the Auditor General and they shouldn't be shielding the Financial Accountability Officer from this bill.

1640

We sit in there, and he talks about technical amendments. They're wiping out whole sections and replacing them. Yes, we asked the government lawyers for some information on what they're doing legally, and the Liberal government here will not let their own lawyers reply with the answers. I don't know what they're talking about. How do they expect us to comment on this bill?

First of all, we had many more people who wanted to speak on this bill with deputations, and they cut that off. They chose who they wanted to listen to. Clearly, a good portion of those thought this bill was a problem.

Here we are. We're going into a cap-and-trade system. And let's be clear: It is just another tax. This government first got elected by writing and signing an agreement that they would never increase taxes.

Mr. Todd Smith: Sure. That lasted a long time.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Yes, it lasted, what, a few months? And what did they do? They came out with the biggest health tax. Let's be clear: They called it a health tax, but it doesn't go against health. That just goes to show you where they're going. Then they came out with the GST after committing to not raising another tax, and of course, with a minority government, they were probably restricted into the tax—

Mr. Arthur Potts: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Beaches–East York has a point of order.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I certainly hope the member will address his remarks to the motion in front of him, which is on time allocation. He needn't go on about taxes and other matters.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you for your input. If I feel that he's drifted too far, I'll be the first to let him know.

Thank you. Continue.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. I know the truth is hurting here, but those are just the facts. I'm sure that in the minority government, we would have seen another tax, but they couldn't because we wouldn't let them, as a minority government; the opposition wouldn't let them put another tax on. Now that they have a majority government, we see the next biggest tax ever. This is what they do: They tax and they spend more.

He talks about the 20-minute recesses, but I'm sure the member opposite knows the standing orders that we follow. We can't ask for a 20-minute recess until the question comes up. That's the rule, so we're forced to do that. Of course you wouldn't give us—we're not allowed to talk. You bring in a new section—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, stop the clock. I don't want to cut into your time.

It appears that the member from Beaches–East York, for whom I stood up, I think, four times to have them stop heckling and talking while you were talking—you're doing the same thing. Isn't that ironic?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Totally ironic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, that's your first warning. You're on the way to the land of promise.

Continue.

Mr. Jim McDonell: If this government keeps going, there will be no land of promise in front of us; that's for sure. Very much, they say one thing, but really do something else. They might be complaining about what they say is filibustering. You should have been in government agencies last week, when they wouldn't even let us table minutes from a subcommittee meeting so that we could request to question Hydro One. Three meetings we held, and we couldn't even get the minutes tabled. They wanted to adjourn the session so we couldn't ask questions about the pending legislation around Hydro One, because they didn't want anybody to know.

This is a government that's far from transparent, and we see again that they're holding us back from finding out just what's going on here.

Yes, we're calling recesses because we have to get advice from people on the technical side. When they delete a whole section and bring a new one in, we're not allowed to talk to the government lawyers. We're asking the legislative lawyers, who are obliged to give us some comment, but can't comment on policy because they can't figure the policy out. Yes, we take some time to see if we can figure out what this government is trying to do, because one thing is for sure: They're jumping ahead of the majority of our neighbours in this cap-and-trade scheme.

We don't see the 49 states south of us doing anything. I was warned—I have a company in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry that has been part of the Quebec cap-and-trade, which this is part of. They said, "Do not go to a cap-and-trade system. Just tax us. We're hiring people and lawyers and accountants to figure the system out. We're writing cheques to Califor-

nia, tens of thousands of dollars”—actually, I think it was over \$100,000—“to buy offsets in California.” How is that doing us any good?

We know it’s happening in Quebec. It’s great for them. They’re probably going to collect a lot on their hydro system because it’s all water. Granted, we’re going to trust this government to really get in there and do some keen negotiating for us, but they’re in such a hurry to get out to BC to have a bill on the table that I don’t even think they looked at it. They’re replacing three quarters of it. It was a rush. They have a commitment to get rid of the deficit by 2018, so we see \$1.9 billion secretly just disappearing into revenue that makes the books look so much better.

I showed up to committee today—I had to show up there at 4 o’clock—and nobody on the government side was there. Well, the Chair was there.

There’s a lot of attention put forth in this bill—they talk one way, but actions say another. I think it’s time that we look at what’s really going on here. There are 70 amendments, and they don’t want to give any explanations. They should really retract this bill and put in what they want.

When our deputations came, they were talking to an entirely different bill, so we don’t really have the expertise based on what’s in front of us anymore.

We went through an election in 2014, and the Premier guaranteed there would be no cap-and-trade system. Maybe you might want to take them at their word, but the climate change minister said they had been working on this for more than two years. So I guess it’s just, “We say one thing, but the actions really mean something else”—a lot of other people would call that different.

We have the amazing number of amendments. Independent officers of the Legislature are warning us about what power this gives the government, with no ability for anybody in the public or the Legislature to know where the money is going. We’ve seen scandals going on where we get money given out. I guess you could give this grant money away to more wind turbines and you could get more Liberal donations, because that’s what we’re seeing here.

Everything they do here has to be, “Do it my way. Now we’re going to wipe out all of the opposition amendments.” I don’t know why that matters because they don’t approve them anyway. Just out of procedure, they’re all written down and are just voted against—because that’s what they can do now.

I think the people of Ontario should be really worried about this bill. It’s a huge bill. Over \$1,000 a year of disposable income will just be taxed back to the government. When you look into it, the price of food is going to go up because the transportation costs are going up and the production costs are going up. What is the real cost of this bill? We’ll see in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Jacek has moved government notice of motion 64. Is the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

I believe the ayes have it.

This will be a 10-minute bell.

I have a deferral motion. Pursuant to standing order 28, the vote will be taken tomorrow after question period.

Vote deferred.

ALTERNATIVE FINANCIAL SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT DES LOIS CONCERNANT LES SERVICES FINANCIERS DE RECHANGE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 18, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 156, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to financial services / *Projet de loi 156, Loi modifiant diverses lois concernant les services financiers.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I’ll be doing my lead speech today—

Mr. Norm Miller: Is it your leadoff?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It’s my leadoff on this.

I’m just noticing the time is not the correct time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): We’re working on it.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much.

Sit back and relax, because I’ll be speaking to you for an hour on this topic.

Applause.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much. I appreciate it. You’re all too kind. It’s wonderful.

This bill could address a really serious issue that’s impacting people in this province. Let’s just reference some facts. Right now, in this land of Canada, it is a criminal offence to charge interest rates of more than 60% annually. That is a criminal offence in this province. Section 347 of the Criminal Code clearly states that if someone charges a criminal interest rate, which is defined as being 60% interest per annum, you can be guilty of an indictable offence that is punishable by up to five years in jail, or through summary conviction with a fine that doesn’t exceed \$25,000 or imprisonment that does not exceed six months.

1650

Despite that, in Ontario, in 2009, the Liberal government placed a cap on payday loans at \$21 per \$100 loan for two weeks. I made the mistake of thinking that \$21 per \$100 meant 21% interest. I thought, “Okay, that’s not that bad.” Twenty-one per cent interest is high—it’s quite high, but it’s like a credit card high—but you have to analyze that definition. That cap is \$21 per \$100 that is loaned for two weeks. That’s 21% interest per two weeks. If you calculate that over a year, it’s a lot more.

Anyone want to guess how much that is? We have some mathematicians in the House, which is great to

hear. It is actually astonishingly high. It is disturbingly high. Let me just reference a great article that was written that talked about this.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: It's 546%.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: That's it.

Some great folks looked at this interest rate and calculated—very much like the member from Barrie mentioned—that it's over 500% per annum. That is a criminally high rate of interest. It's 500%. That was not a very effective cap, when the government brought in that cap. They did not help people by bringing in a cap that's still 500% interest.

It's very important to understand that payday loans don't make money off people who pay back their loans immediately. Those folks are not the people that they're actually trying to make money from. They want people who don't pay their loans, because it doesn't factor into account late fees, processing fees or compound interest, which also can be accrued. This is literally preying on the vulnerable.

It's important to note—a councillor from Hamilton raised this issue—that if you look at the communities where payday loan companies are set up, if you look at where they're located, it's in a lower-economic portion of the city. There was some research done by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. They looked at the community and looked at this lower-income part of the community in the lower city and they found—this report was reported in February 2016, so this year—that over the past 10 years, in the lower city and the lower socio-economic portion of the city, there was almost 20% fewer banks, so access to financial institutions that offer reasonable loans and give you access to finances in a manner that does not exploit you, or not to the same extent, at least, that payday loans do. There were 20% fewer financial institutions like banks, but there were 32% more payday loan businesses in this lower socio-economic part of the community. So there are 32% more of these predatory companies and 20% fewer regular banking financial institutions.

It's clear, if you do a Google search, if you look at where you can locate payday loans, generally speaking, in any community, if you look at a city and look at where the folks who are hard hit and who are vulnerable live, you'll find that's where the consolidation or the concentration of payday loan companies is. They literally are designed to prey off people, to prey off not anybody but the people who are the most vulnerable.

On top of that—this is the part that really irks me, that really troubles me in society—it's folks who actually need lower interest rates who have to pay the highest interest rates. If you are financially secure, you have a good-paying job, you have assets and you have resources, you are offered very reasonable loans. In fact, it's not hard to get loans that are close to the prime rate. You can get prime rate interest, and sometimes less than prime rate if you secure it with your home. You can end up paying interest rates, per annum, that are hovering around 1%. That's not unreasonable if you have assets and you have wealth, and maybe even less than that.

People who have money and people who have assets have access to affordable rates of interest. People who don't have money, who are struggling to pay their bills, who don't have property or a home in their own name are forced to pay loans with interest rates that are 500%. It's just unimaginable. But what does this bill do to address that?

The bill addresses three components. It looks at collection and debt settlement services, it addresses consumer protection and it addresses payday loans. In the consumer services component, it looks at cashing government cheques. There's also a component that deals with rent-to-own and paying loans in instalments. The final component, which talks about payday loans, does not address this cap issue at all.

This could have been a great opportunity to address this outrageous cap, which needs to be addressed. In fact, you'll notice something quite interesting if you have travelled to Quebec. If you have driven around Quebec, even in the lower socio-economic parts of the city—for example, the city of Montreal or Quebec City—you'll notice something. Or you'll notice something that's not there. There aren't any payday loan companies, and you're probably curious. Why is that? Why aren't there any payday loan companies in Quebec? In Ottawa, cross the river and you're in Gatineau. Why is it that they can exist in Ontario, but they don't exist across the river? What's so different across that one little river?

I'll tell you what's different. The Quebec government imposed a restriction. Their equivalent consumer protection ministry imposed a requirement that they will not issue licences to any payday loan companies that charge interest rates higher than 35% per annum. Guess what happened?

Thirty-five per cent is still a quite a high interest rate; it's quite lucrative. If someone offered me a chance to make 35% interest off my investment, I would jump at it; that's a pretty great investment. But there are no payday loan companies operating in Quebec. There's no one there offering 35%. They can't operate on that already extremely high interest rate, because they need to operate on these predatory rates of 500% or 600% for them to be economically viable. That, in and of itself, should say something about this industry. If they can't exist in a province that has put in a 35% cap, or they don't want to exist in that province—whatever the case—then there's clearly something wrong with this industry. If they cannot operate in Quebec at a 35% cap, that means there's something wrong, and we should be looking to Quebec for leadership on this and implementing something similar.

I want to give a shout-out to our member from Parkdale–High Park, who has been a champion on this. She has introduced a number of bills on this issue of payday loans going back to 2007, when she raised this issue. In fact, I was just reading a colleague from Niagara Falls's excerpts from the late, great Mr. Kormos, who raised this issue in Parliament as well. He also credited our member from Parkdale–High Park for her great work in championing this.

That was back in 2007, more than nine years ago. This issue was raised nine years ago. Nine years ago, the member from the New Democratic Party raised concerns around capping this industry and addressing the fact that this is a predatory form of providing financial resources—financial loans—and it's not acceptable.

1700

As a province, people might say, "Well, if the consumer is using this product, that means there's an interest in this product." In fact, with the Criminal Code that speaks to the criminal rate—that's 60% or higher—you would think, then: Why aren't these payday loan companies being charged with a criminal offence if it's against the law, if there's a criminal offence of charging rates of more than 60%?

Well, it's because there is an exemption. The federal government placed an exemption that these sorts of companies, payday loan companies, are exempt from that Criminal Code section. They are not subject to that section. They can charge interest rates, again, upwards of hundreds of percentile points and they're exempt. What they've required is that the provinces—they actually noted in a report that there seems to be an interest—payday loan companies are growing—there seems to be a consumer interest in this.

Mr. Speaker, this is not consumer interest; this is desperation. We have to be able to distinguish between people who are down and out, who are desperate because they can't afford to pay their next bill and who are willing to take interest rates of 500% plus. If they're doing that, they're not doing it because it's economically sound. It's not fiscally responsible. It doesn't make any sense. They're doing it because they're desperate.

If those companies are growing, contrary to what that report stated—that the consumer is interested in this product—the reality is that consumers are desperate. What we should be doing is finding ways for those folks to have access to more affordable forms of credit, if they need credit. More importantly, we need to find ways to ensure that they're out of poverty and are not reliant on these types of predatory loans. That's what we need to be doing.

What does the bill prescribe that's positive? Let's talk about some of the positive points of this bill, because in fairness, there are some important points that are raised by it.

With respect to the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act portion, the first component of the bill, it seeks to make some changes around collection and debt settlement services.

One component that I raise as a positive component is that the bill allows for penalties to be applied if someone violates the regulations under collection services. So if there is some impropriety in the way people are conducting their duties, having a penalty that can be assigned—on the surface of it, it may seem like a positive thing, to deter people. But there's always a catch with the Liberal government. A penalty is important to be able to sanction certain behaviour, but it's the manner in which this

penalty is administered. We've seen this government time and time again not preferring the ability to have your day in court, not preferring the ability to have your evidence heard, have an arbiter make a decision, be able to call defence, be able to call evidence, have the prosecution be able to call their case and have the defence be able to mount their defence.

The way in which these penalties are going to be administered strips people of this important right, and it's a trend. This is a trend that's also something we're seeing in terms of how these administrative penalties are being brought into the traffic court, into the Highway Traffic Act.

This, as a policy directive, is very troubling. It's fundamentally important that people have their day in court. Whether there's someone who's not very sympathetic, like someone who is a debt collector—that's not someone who normally inspires a lot of sympathy, but if they have violated a regulation, if they've done something improper, they are entitled to have their day in court to ensure that justice is served.

Contrary to what the government talked about earlier today, when they talked about how, with election rule changes, it's about the content, the process is the hallmark of just societies. The process is fundamentally important. That we have a process that's transparent, that's fair and that allows for both parties in an adversarial system to bring forward their arguments, that's very fundamentally important. Whether we're talking about a penalty that's applied in a case that's probably not the most sympathetic case—a debt collector—whether it's someone who has been charged with a speeding ticket, or whether it's the way we come up—and this is a very important element—with election reform in this province, it's the process that's fundamentally important.

That's why when we talk about having a process, when it comes to election reform, that is transparent, that is non-partisan, that involves some independence, some elements which—I give credit to Bill Davis for the way he brought about changes to the Election Act, and election reform in general. He brought forward an independent panel that involved an independent chair and non-partisan members of the law society. Those are the hallmarks of a just, transparent and fair process. That is, at the minimum, what we would expect when we're talking about election reform.

In this circumstance, it may not garner a lot of attention, but it's a trend that's troubling, and we have to be sure that we don't allow this type of process to move forward, that we don't allow this type of usurping of the right to trial, as a broader policy, to be expanded. That's why we have to stop it at this point.

Beyond that, there are some troubling components of this. While the idea of a sanction is good, the manner in which the sanction is being proposed is bad. But in addition, for some reason, the government is exempting a number of organizations or institutions from the regulations that govern collection services. I don't understand why the government is doing that.

For example, under this proposed bill, the government is seeking to exempt a number of players. An authorized foreign bank would be excluded from the regulations for collection agencies. Someone who purchases debt through acquiring or merging with a business in a transaction that includes the transfer of accounts receivable—again, why would this exemption be proposed? It only weakens the protections that are outlined that were supposed to protect consumer from impropriety, from aggressive behaviour on the phone, from sometimes very demeaning experiences that I'm sure some of your constituents have told you about. We don't want people to be subject to that. It's inappropriate, from my perspective, that there are these exemptions that allow certain companies, or certain institutions or certain entities, to no longer be covered by these regulations.

Again, my question to the government is, why? Why are you exempting a number of entities or institutions? To me, it doesn't make any sense. You would think that you would want to bolster protection, that you'd want to ensure that the regulations that protect people from these types of behaviours that we don't want people to be engaging in—that collection services regulations should apply to any entity that's engaging in that activity. Why would you exempt anyone? To me, that doesn't make any sense. I look forward to the government providing some explanation for that, but I don't see any reason for it. In fact, what it does is weaken the oversight of these companies, and it weakens the protection for the consumer. I would like to know why certain entities are being exempted. That's something that, to me, doesn't make sense.

There was a regime that was initiated such that people who are debt collectors, who are engaged in collection services, must be registered. This bill seeks to remove that licensing regime. I don't see how that benefits the consumer. Requiring collection agencies to be registered would ensure that there are some accountability mechanisms, so removing that requirement, to me, is weakening protection of the consumer. Again, I'm concerned with why that's being proposed and how that strengthens or protects the consumer. Again, I submit, Mr. Speaker, that it doesn't protect the consumer and, in fact, it weakens protection.

We've talked about this, but again, the introduction of an administrative monetary penalty regime—this is a regime that this government is moving to, more and more. This is something that is unacceptable. It is something that's offensive to the concept of the rule of law, and it is something that we need to soundly reject as a policy.

There are some very minor, specific circumstances where people might stomach the notion of administrative monetary penalties. Some of those areas that people don't have particular ire about are maybe parking tickets. Maybe a parking ticket could be so benign, if it's a minor fee.

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But then sometimes we have scenarios where you're potentially liable to pay \$100 or \$500 for a very egre-

gious parking violation. I think people should be able to mount some sort of defence in those circumstances because the cost is so high. You wouldn't hire a lawyer, perhaps, but at least you'd be able to mount your own defence in those circumstances. But the convention should be that we do not support administrative monetary penalties as a regime. It is not consistent with the rule of law. It's not consistent with having your right to a trial.

There's another general trend that this government is engaging in, and that trend is that instead of putting forward the substance of the law in the legislation, the government is preferring to put all the actual substance into regulation. Let me give you an example: There is a great issue raised on the cashing of government cheques. There really should not be a significant fee associated with that. If you're going to cash a government cheque, there is a lot of confidence that that cheque is a solid financial instrument. You know there's going to be someone who's going to pay that amount.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Charles Sousa's signature is on the cheque.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: There is a significant signature on these cheques. Whether it's provincial, municipal or federal, that's a very serious institution that's backing it up. That's a government, so you can rest assured that there will be backing of that instrument. So the idea of regulating the amount that's charged makes a lot of sense. There should be some limitation. It shouldn't be the case that people are having to pay astronomical fees to cash a cheque which is pretty secure and there's really no risk involved.

But here's the catch again. The government mentions that there should be limits, and some of the suggestions are that some of these proposed solutions may include a fixed amount, a percentage of the face value, a combination of a fixed amount and a percentage, or "any amount determined by any other prescribed means." Basically, there is nothing in the bill that says what you're actually going to do. It just says you're going to do something. So when we vote on this particular component of the bill, we're voting on the government saying, "Hey, we're going to put some limit in."

What's that limit? How is that limit going to be set? What limit is that going to be? Is it going to be a percentage? Is it going to be a fixed amount? Is it going to be a combination or something else? We don't know, because the way the bill is written, it doesn't say. It could be any one of those. It could be one. It could be A, B, C or none of the above and a totally different one. That's the way the bill is written, which again to me is probably not the best way to bring legislation forward, because how can we effectively debate the bill? We don't really know.

It's a trend that's going on that we're allowing things to be in regulation. Now, the case for regulation is that there are certain things that fluctuate, there are certain things that are uncertain, and having the flexibility, having the nimbleness of having an option that allows for changes in regulation—sure, it could be an option. But when the entire premise of the bill, or this component or

this portion of the bill, is to say, “We are going to put a limitation in place,” but you don’t say how, how do you expect anyone to provide input? We could suggest, “Hey, a percentage is a good idea,” but in terms of voting for this, as it stands it’s difficult to do so. It’s a good idea: We should put a limit. I’m saying I could vote in favour of the idea of putting a limit, but it’s difficult when you don’t provide the actual limit or even a notion of which of the four options it’s going to be. That’s an important issue.

Now, another component of this bill which, again, is a positive idea but isn’t really fleshed out is that it introduces the notion that if you’re cashing a government cheque, you would require the supplier to provide the customer with mandatory information regarding the cashing of the cheque. Great. Now, what would be that mandatory information, Mr. Speaker? You’re probably wondering, right? We should know what mandatory information the government is requiring the institution to provide. Guess what? It’s left to regulation. The nature, the content, all of that is to be disclosed, is to be determined, is to be announced. Again, we could provide some ideas and say, “Listen, at the minimum you should know what the amount is, why that amount is being charged. You should understand what amount is actually a cost, in terms of a processing cost, and what amount is the profit component”—getting a sense of that. Maybe some sort of disclosure that there are other options for you to cash this cheque where you aren’t going to be charged—you could take it to a bank, for example—maybe some sort of notification that, “Hey, even though you don’t have a bank account, there are other places that will cash this cheque for free. But if you want to do it here, you can still go ahead and do it.” Those are some suggestions off the top of my head.

This is a bill that you’ve introduced, as a government, and presumably it’s going to go to second reading, and there’s going to be a vote, and you’re going to say, “Hey, can you vote for this bill?” So we’re essentially voting for—“Yes, we believe in the mandatory statement. What’s in that statement?” “We don’t know. We’ll get back to you on it.” It’s a little weird. It’s difficult to conduct a Legislature that way, when you don’t really provide the substance.

To some extent, there is some consultation going on now with respect to the cashing of the government cheques. There is some suggestion around what the amount should be. There are some ideas being floated. That’s good. I’m hoping the government would make a very clear announcement and say, “These are some of the regulations we’re proposing. If you vote for this bill, this is roughly where we’re going with regulations.” That would be helpful, but what would be more helpful is if, in terms of a general trend, we put more of the substance of the bill in the legislation. Their argument is, “Well, it’s not very nimble. If we need to change it, we’ll have to bring in new legislation.” Maybe that’s not such a bad idea. When you bring legislation forward, it allows for input from the House and it allows for scrutiny. There’s

really a lot to be said for scrutiny; that’s what we want to see more of. Accountability, transparency—these are issues that the people of Ontario are concerned about. They’ve seen that this government isn’t very accountable, isn’t very transparent, doesn’t really like to make decisions that are open for people to actually take a look at. It likes to make very closed decisions.

Another example is election reform. You have all the political parties of the province coming together to say—we’re not saying to listen to our opinion. We’re not saying, “Hey, do it the way we’re saying.” We’re saying, let’s make this non-partisan. The process through which we change laws in this land shouldn’t be partisan.

You’ve been elected to make decisions around health care, and you’re deciding to make cuts to health care. That’s your decision, and you have a mandate to make those cuts. We oppose that; we think it’s not appropriate. But you have a right to, obviously, make those decisions. You are deciding to make laws that continually cut the benefits that people receive when it comes to auto insurance. You’re making laws that continually cut the benefits people receive and encourage greater profits for the insurance industry—lower costs, greater insurance profits and higher premiums. You’re not bringing the premiums down. Again, you have the mandate to make decisions. We disagree with your decisions, but you’ve been elected to make those decisions—absolutely. But there is something very different about policy decisions when it comes to health care, when it comes to auto insurance and when it comes to the way you govern the province, and the way our election rules are set out. That’s a very different issue. Election rules should be defined and should be set out in a way that’s truly non-partisan because they’re going to impact all parties and they’re going to fundamentally impact democracy.

When people get up and say, “It’s democratic to let things go to committee”—it is a part of the democratic process, but it’s not a very democratic way to deal with electoral reform when you have a government that’s in majority and when you have a committee that’s in majority. It doesn’t allow for true independence or a true consensus-based decision-making process. That’s why the process is so fundamentally important. That’s why transparency and openness is so important. That’s why the government should consider putting more of the substance of the bill into the legislation, as opposed to leaving everything to regulation.

I’m sure some of you were worried that I wasn’t going to connect it back to the bill, but I’m sure you’ve seen how I’ve done that.

The next part of this bill talks about the rent-to-own scenarios. Again, we need to look at the realities of who is being impacted and who is making use of these services, and then look at the laws that we’re going to apply to them. I’m sure you can look at your constituents: Rent-to-own scenarios are mostly impacting people who are of a lower socio-economic background. If you can afford to purchase something or you can afford to rent a place that’s fully furnished, you would choose to do so.

The folks who are renting to own often are folks who are in more of a difficult situation.

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As legislators, we have a responsibility to make sure that they're not being exploited, and that's where it's important for the government to make sure that we look at the realities of who is being impacted by this.

Again, going back to the first point where we talked about the government report that had the audacity to say that it looks like payday loans are increasing and flourishing; that means people are choosing to use payday loans. That's not the reality. That's someone who has put blinders on and not looked at—if people are using more food banks, it doesn't mean people want to use more food banks; that means they're poor and desperate, and life is difficult. It doesn't mean people are choosing to use a food bank. It's something that is a last resort.

Similarly, if people are using more payday loans, it's not because that's their financial institute of choice; it's because they have nowhere else to go. So, similarly, when we look at rent-to-own, we need to make sure that we analyze whether this is an option for people who have expendable income and are deciding, "Hey, it's in my benefit right now not to actually purchase something outright, and I'm benefiting from the option of renting it," or is it actually going to exploit people who are going to pay twice, triple, quadruple the actual cost of that item because they couldn't afford to buy it outright, and they're having to rent to own it?

This is where we need to be legislators and step in and ensure that people are not being exploited and not making choices based on desperation, instead of making choices based on their free will or their actual, genuine free choice.

There are components of this portion of the bill that are very positive. There is a component of this bill that requires a full disclosure of what the costing is. That's a positive thing. That's something that we want to see. We want people to be able to look at the full cost over the lifetime and say, "Hey, if I bought this outright, it would cost me \$1,000, but if I rent to own it, I'm going to end up spending \$5,000. Maybe I don't need to rent to own this thing or maybe I shouldn't rent to own it because that's pretty crazy for me to spend five times the cost." People need to know that, and it's important to have that disclosure.

Now, you're wondering, "Are the details of that cost disclosure in this bill? Are the exact components of what the cost disclosure is going to look like in this bill?" Surprise, surprise, Mr. Speaker, they're not again. Those are going to be, again, left to regulation, and the details are going to be left to regulation. In fact, in this case, the way they're framed is that it allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to have control over certain key terms of the lease. It is important to note, though, that they are not required to take action.

These are the following areas that the Lieutenant Governor in Council has the power to impact, but it's

not, in any way, guaranteeing that there will be any sort of guidance or leadership on this or some sort of requirement. It's going to allow for the option of taking action on providing a grace period for late payments, limiting the penalty amount for late payments, governing the type of information that may be displayed around a leasable good, restricting the rights of seizure and termination rights and allowing for reinstatement—for example, changing one's mind.

These are always examples of areas that regulations may address, but, again, it's not clear if they will be addressed or not. That's, again, the major problem with leaving everything to regulation. It leaves a great deal of uncertainty, and we are unable to make an assessment of what we're actually voting on. What are we actually supporting in this legislation? These are some concerns that I want to raise at this stage.

There is also a component of this bill that touches on instalment loans. When you make a loan and have the option for instalments, this will allow for some governance around what those agreements can look like. Again, a positive thing—great. We want to ensure that the government makes sure that these types of loan arrangements are not going to exploit people and that they're going to be fair.

I'm just going to give you a sense of what the bill tries to do. It's going to prohibit lenders "from entering into a credit agreement with a borrower if the amount of the credit to be ... lent under the agreement exceeds the prescribed amounts...." What is the prescribed amount? We don't know, because it's a prescribed amount. It's going to be left to regulation.

The problem, again, is that we don't know what that regulation is going to look like, and that's a weakness in terms of allowing various members in this House, particularly the opposition, to provide scrutiny. What if the prescribed amount is not good?

Right now, we're in public debate. The public can come and watch in this House or from home. Hansard allows for everything to be displayed in relatively real time. By the end of the day, they'll be able to see the debate, so people can take a look at what's going on, if they choose to. It allows for public scrutiny, it allows for scrutiny from the opposition, and it allows that bill to be brought into this House and to be debated and discussed. But when you leave everything to regulation, it doesn't allow for that same level of scrutiny, it doesn't allow for that debate, it doesn't allow for that discussion and, again, it doesn't allow for transparency and openness.

I'll be honest with you: That's the main concern that people—or one of the main concerns. People are concerned about some other issues, perhaps the mismanagement of funds, perhaps what people are calling—I'm not saying this myself—corruption in this government. But these are issues that people are—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't need any coaches. I'm well aware of the rules. Thanks to the back-seat drivers.

The member knows that word is unacceptable, no matter what forms it takes or who said it. You will withdraw, please.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: People have some legitimate concerns out there, and one of their major concerns is a lack of transparency and accountability from this government. That's something you can address by putting more things out there in the open and in a transparent manner—just a suggestion.

You're leaving a lot of things to regulation, a lot of things to prescribed amounts, amounts to be determined in regulation, amounts to be determined by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. This is probably not the best way for you to govern, particularly given the reputation that's out there for this government—just a suggestion.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Jagmeet for leader.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you, sir.

The payday loan issue: Let's get back to the payday loan issue. This is a massive area where we need to do a lot of work. This is where we really need to look at what can be done.

First and foremost, I think the immediate step is looking at the province of Quebec. What they've done is implemented a strong cap on payday loan companies. Let's go there; let's go to a strong cap that makes it very clear that in this province, it's not acceptable for people to be exploited by 500%-plus—even higher than that—interest rates. That is not acceptable in our province. Let's make that a statement, loud and clear.

This bill does not include any caps. This bill does not have a cap on the amount that people can charge in terms of interest rates. Instead, let's work towards making it more accessible for people to have access to affordable interest, looking at ways to make it more accessible—to have access to credit unions, to have access to financial institutions that are in communities, instead of having what we've seen in Hamilton and other communities, where there's been a marked growth of payday loan companies in lower socio-economic parts of the city at the cost of a reduction of actual good financial institutions that provide more accessible and more reasonable levels of interest. Let's reverse that trend and make it easier for people to access those funds.

More importantly, let's take people out of that desperate scenario where they need to access these outrageous types of loans that put people deeper into poverty. Some people might make the argument that this is choice. People who are poor need to be able to have access to credit, and that's the only form of credit available to them. If a form of credit is going to put you into worse poverty, that is not a real choice. That is not a choice that makes your life any better. That is something we should not be allowing or condoning in our province. So first and foremost, I think our position should be, let's put a hard cap that precludes people from being exploited. It's literally outrageous that the rates are so high, so let's put that in place. Quebec has done it. If they can do it, there's

really no reason why we can't do it, so let's look at that. That's the first step.

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Secondly, when it comes to the actual—oh, let me give you another example. The Ottawa Business Journal had an article on May 24, 2013, by Michael Prentice. The title of the article is "The True Price of Payday Loans." The bill is looking at what the true cost of these loans really is. What is the true cost? In the article, he came up with the amount of the annual interest, which is 546%. If it's \$21 per \$100 amount for two weeks, that's 546% annual interest.

He compared it to pawnbrokers. Pawnbrokers are restricted to a 60% per annum interest rate. They are restricted to what's within the criminal rate of interest. If it exceeds 60%, that's a criminal rate of interest. That's what our society has decided. So pawnbrokers are restricted to 60%. They are restricted to stay within the criminal, so they are no longer criminal. They are actually right on the line. Why is it that we can restrict pawnbrokers in terms of their interest and we cannot do so for payday loan companies? I think the case is there for us to do that. That's one.

Secondly, what does this bill allow us to do? The bill looks at some of the issues around payday loans. One of the issues is repeat payday loans. People who are in a cycle of poverty get one loan to try to pay off a bill, maybe find a way to pay that loan back, and then have to take out another loan right away. Again, there's a vast difference between free choice and a choice made out of desperation that is actually harmful and hurtful to your financial position.

The bill talks about restricting replacement or repeat payday loans. The way the bill is crafted, it allows for the government to redefine the number of days the lender must wait since the borrower has paid in full the outstanding balance under the first agreement. Now, they can redefine the number of days. As it is currently, the status quo is that they must wait at least seven days. This component of the bill allows the government to come up with an increased amount of time perhaps and say, "Okay, we will make them wait longer than seven days," and say they have to wait 10 days, a month or two months.

The point is that this is a stopgap measure. This is not a significant way to address the real problems people are facing. This is important in the sense that people do engage in repeat loans and it puts people into a deeper cycle of poverty, but it's not really addressing the real issue here.

There are other components of the bill that allow the minister, again, to make regulations that address things like prohibiting the lender from entering into more than the prescribed number of payday loan agreements with the same borrower in a one-year period. So the number of loans that someone can engage in is being potentially limited by the minister, which could be seen as a positive step in terms of protecting. They can prohibit a loan broker from facilitating more than the prescribed number

of payday loan agreements between the same borrower and different lenders in a one-year period, and prohibit licensees from offering or providing prescribed goods and services other than payday loans to anyone. It is unclear what these goods or services will be; they could be anything like a gift card, for example.

All of these prohibitions are incremental steps in terms of providing protection. They are incremental steps in providing some level of, I guess, a limit to which someone would fall into these predatory loans. But it doesn't address the actual crux of the problem. Limiting the number of loans, limiting the time between one loan and another loan, limiting the number of institutions that loans can be prescribed to: These are all, again, just kind of ancillary issues to the main issue, which is that the problem people are facing is poverty, the problem that people are facing is predatory interest rates, and none of this really gets to the heart of those problems.

We raised an issue—and this is speaking to the nature of the problem when it comes to this industry—that people were receiving gift cards around Christmastime. I'm sure you'll remember this. What was happening was that payday loan companies were taking those gift cards and providing half of whatever the value was. So if the gift card was \$50, the payday company was saying, "We will give you \$25 on that."

Looking at that scenario, on an emotional level, people started to think—I mean, these are people who are down and out. They're looking at this gift card and saying, "Hey, listen, I can't even use this gift card. There's no sense in me going out and buying fancy clothes when I can't even afford to eat food. Let me go and return this and get some money off of it." The fact that the amount that they were taking was half, 50% of the value when someone was to turn that in, rubbed people the wrong way. People started to feel it was just outrageous that that's the amount people were taking. What people realized is that that's inappropriate. There was great media attention on this issue, and that practice stopped.

That's an offensive thing, and people were offended by it, but we should feel even more offended that people are being charged this astronomical rate of interest. That should be something that should offend each and every one of us. It should offend us that people, knowing how bad it is, still go to these institutions. We really need to look at what are some real, creative, innovative ways that we can make financial resources available to people who are in difficult circumstances. That's what we really should be looking at.

We should be looking at ways to uplift people out of poverty, like having a minimum wage that's a livable wage. We should look at ways to ensure that people can get good-paying jobs. We should look at ways to take people out of poverty so that they're not left to these difficult situations.

We should also look at ways that we can make life more affordable. We should look at, when we look at home heating and how expensive it is, ways to make it more accessible for people to obtain high-efficiency

appliances, but more importantly, to insulate their homes. We talk sometimes about reducing the costs by reducing a component of a bill, a percentage of a bill, taking a certain tax off. If we actually looked at the savings that someone could enjoy if they were able to retrofit their home—one, it's better for the environment, but two, if you look at the cost reductions of simply providing someone with better insulation—in low-income communities, where people are struggling, if they were able to have better insulated homes, that could actually save their home heating bills a 20% or 30% cost, just by having a home that's better insulated.

Making those types of programs more available, having innovative ideas around using the existing infrastructure in a home—there is heating available from the sun that hits the roof and there are ways to use that heating to actually heat the home, but it's something that's not accessible to most people because they don't have the resources to do it. Making sure that we look at ways to make life more affordable, that we can reduce their costs, that we can increase their ways of earning, we can increase minimum wage, like I've said: These are things that we need to look at if we really want to address the root cause of payday loans.

The root cause, again, is inequality. The root cause is poverty. The root cause is unfairness. We should do more to ensure that there is more fairness, and we can, we absolutely can. This bill just scratches the surface and talks in kind of a meandering way around the root issues. It talks about issues around the root causes of why people are actually accessing these loans. It looks at some of the disclosure of the loans, it looks at some of the restrictions in terms of how many, when and where, but it doesn't look at why—why are people actually accessing these loans? That's really the main problem with this bill. That's why it's missing the boat or missing the real opportunity that this bill had.

There are some other issues that the bill talks about, and they give us some concern. One component is that the bill restricts third-party loan agreements. In these scenarios, this example is if a borrower enters into a third payday loan agreement within 62 days of their first payday loan agreement, the lender is required to ensure a number of conditions are fulfilled. They have to ensure that the term of the third payday loan agreement is at least 62 days so that they ensure that there is that gap that's been established. Secondly, the agreement provides that the borrower is required to repay the advance and the cost of borrowing to the lender in the prescribed number of instalments and at the prescribed times.

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Again, while it is looking at providing more protection in the case of third payday loan agreements, the problem is that, for us to provide a really detailed analysis about whether this is actually going to be effective, we need to know what are the prescribed number of instalments and what are the prescribed times. Those details are not within the bill.

There are a number of other regulation-changing opportunities that the bill provides, allowing the Lieuten-

ant Governor in Council to make certain regulation changes. Some of the notable ones are requiring the lender to consider the prescribed factors with respect to a borrower before making a payday loan agreement. This is, again, looking at some of the scenarios around why people are going to a payday loan company. So it requires lenders to consider the prescribed factors. What are those factors? Are they going to look into whether or not this person has the means to pay back the loan, or whether this loan would put them into a financially worse position or will it actually improve them? What are the prescribed factors?

It prevents a lender from entering into more than the prescribed number of payday loan agreements with the same borrower. What, again, are the prescribed number of payday loan agreements? If the payday loans were at a reasonable interest rate, maybe we would say that there is no limit; that if it's a reasonable amount of interest, someone could be able to make that decision on their own. The reason why we're actually limiting this is because it's such an astronomical, predatory interest rate.

Again, the party has done a lot of work around this. I first have to give a lot of credit to our member from Parkdale-High Park, who introduced numerous bills on this issue, starting back in 2007. I myself also introduced a motion in this House that would allow for a number of components. One of the things that I included was ensuring that a database was established to ban rollover loans. Rollover loans really exploit people. We need to ensure that there is a database around that and that there is tracking around that.

Another component that I talked about, and maybe we should get into some detail around this, is that people are accessing payday loan companies because that's the only option they have. In my motion, I talked about ensuring that the government works with financial institutions to provide alternative services, for example credit unions, and the idea of postal banking in low-income communities. So there are other ways that we can provide opportunities for financial services in communities that are low-income. There are other forms of services that can be established so that people don't have to go to payday loans. It is incumbent on the government, if we want to address poverty in a meaningful way, that we come up with some strategies that are not just literally Band-Aids to the existing problem. There's a problem of payday loan companies and people are using them. Let's put a Band-Aid on it by regulating it.

Mr. Kormos had a quote around this: that you can't regulate poverty; you need to uplift people out of poverty. These are all attempts and steps to regulate the conditions and scenarios around poverty. They're not ways of actually uplifting people out of these desperate situations. What can we do to do that? That's what this bill really needs to speak to, and this bill doesn't address that. That's what we really need to have a discussion about: What can we do as a government to ensure that people have access to resources?

There's a great program that I had the opportunity to visit myself. It's called CEE and it's based out of the east

part of Toronto—a shout-out to CEE, if anyone is listening from CEE. You do phenomenal work. I was really impressed by the work that you do there. One of the projects that they do at CEE is they offer micro-financing or small loans to students who come into their program to give them a chance to start up their own company. What they do with that start-up capital: Is they learn how to start up a company; they're mentored with other folks; they work on projects—they're given a small amount to work on a particular project; they learn how to budget; and they learn how to execute a plan.

With this modern environment that we're moving into in terms of this new information- and technology-based economy, we have an amazing opportunity. I was in Australia, and Australia has far less access to broadband and to high-quality Internet than we do. We complain that, in Ontario, we sometimes don't have the best access, and in the north, we have absolutely abysmal access. People are still using dial-up and don't have access to broadband. But most major cities in the south of Ontario all have excellent access to Internet.

In Australia, major, fully developed cities—not in rural communities, not in the north, not in the centre where they have the massive desert—don't actually have broadband Internet. We have infrastructure here which would allow us to be leaders in the world when it comes to information technology, if we provided opportunities to young people and entrepreneurs and gave them opportunities to start up their entrepreneurial endeavors.

We have a government that's providing funding without disclosing the list, without disclosing the reasoning, to companies that don't need any funding. We have some suggestions that there's a pay-to-play scenario going on, where certain companies that are donating are being provided with funding or provided with grants.

Instead of that scenario, where the government is providing resources to folks who don't need it, they could provide a scenario where we provide resources to people who need it. They could actually use those resources to engage in meaningful employment. They could engage in developing some sort of innovative technology. They could engage in starting up a company. These are things that we could do that would reduce the need for people going out to get a loan from a payday loan company.

There are things that we could do. There are innovative ways that we can approach this problem. It takes some broader vision about what our goals are, and it requires really addressing the problem and not just trying to do something that sounds good, that looks like you're addressing the issue. On the surface, the government can say, "We're going to address some of the issues around cashing government cheques. We're going to address some of the issues around payday loan companies." But are you really substantially doing something about it? This is a great opportunity to address some problems, but you're not.

Anyway, back to CEE: CEE provides resources to at-risk youth, provides opportunities to at-risk youth and

provides them with a way to get out of the cycle of poverty, so that they don't require payday loans and they don't require making decisions out of desperation. Those are the types of things that we need to see more of.

When I look in the city of Brampton, in terms of where the locations of payday loans are, I see that they're all concentrated in the areas of our community which are less well-off, less developed and where people have less opportunities. It's very stark. It's very obvious that this is a business that is thriving in areas where people are not doing so well. That's why it's so important for us to do all we can to ensure that those people are protected.

It's often said that the people who don't need protection seem to have all the protection in the world, that people who don't need resources seem to have access to all the resources in the world, that people who don't need help seem to get all the help. It's really the responsibility of legislators to reverse that trend and see who needs help—let's help them; who actually needs access to resources—let's give them that access; and who can benefit from assistance—let's ensure that they receive the assistance. That's our responsibility. That's what we're elected to do, and that's what we should be doing with this opportunity.

It's been a pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to address this assembly on this issue, and I thank you for the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Before questions and comments, I want to say to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, Mr. Kormos would be proud of you. He was a real stickler for using your time, and you used the full hour. Congrats.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thanks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I'm pleased to stand and make some comments with regard to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

At first, I was listening attentively, taking notes, and was going to make a somewhat impassioned response, but then we got to the comment that had to be withdrawn and I am cross, Mr. Speaker, because I will give you in the House a little history lesson, if you can bear with me.

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In 1990, when the NDP government came to power, one of the first things they did was cancel funding to the Consumers' Association of Canada, which ran a consumer complaint line here in Ontario. The outcome of that was the eventual demise of that organization. That organization, because I was asked to help wind it down, could not even get a meeting with the NDP minister of consumer affairs to talk about this issue. There were two companies in those days that were involved in those types of loans, and we asked as a consumer organization that rollover loans be controlled and that predatory pricing be controlled, along with a whole bunch of issues. We couldn't even get a meeting because we were told the government of the day could do a better job, and they did absolutely nothing.

I'll tell you, it was pretty infuriating. So I don't need to sit on this side of the House and be lectured at—

Interjections.

Mr. Chris Ballard: No, it certainly is a load of bullspit, if I may.

This is good legislation, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. You're done.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's an honour to stand here and comment on the deputy leader of the third party, the opposition party, and the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. I always enjoy listening to his comments. He's very logical, very succinct in presenting his ideas and facts.

This is an act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act and the Payday Loans Act. Those are the three acts that are in fact affected by this particular bill that has been presented to us. As a party, Speaker, we've got some concerns about this, and we believe that there need to be some amendments brought forth on this particular bill.

Payday lending, in fact, as we say, is a last resort for consumers who actually have bad credit, or basically no credit at all, or who in fact are experiencing unexpected expenses or an unexpected drop in income. That's what payday lending can help them with.

Again, I want to suggest something here. The bill expands the reach of the government from rule-setting to micromanaging. Whenever I hear that word "micromanaging," I automatically think of red tape and what red tape is involved in this. Of course, one of the things that we're very concerned about, and we've heard this many, many times, is that the devil's in the details. We might suggest that maybe the devil's right across from us, but it's in the details, and we don't always get the details. So we're looking at when this bill—and it will probably pass second reading, and when it gets into committee, we'll be bringing forth some very pointed amendments to make this bill a stronger bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm proud to rise on Bill 156 and thank my colleague for the great job he did. But I'm going to talk about somebody here that we honoured today, Mr. Peter Kormos. This is what he said eight years ago—they've had eight years to fix it. Here's what he said.

"This issue has been with us for far too long. Folks are getting gouged, getting ripped off, getting burned, getting scammed by payday lenders with interest rates that are compounding, but hidden away—not just hundreds of percentages, but thousands. I quite frankly, at the end of the day, would rather not regulate payday lenders; I would rather abolish them, because there shouldn't be room in our society for these types of rip-off artists...."

"It is incredibly important, when this goes to committee, that there be wide-ranging, broad-based consultations, not just here in Toronto, but access to that

committee should be made available to everybody across the province because, let me tell you”—and this is Peter Kormos saying this eight years ago—“the reality for people in Toronto is not the reality for people in smaller-town Ontario” or the reality in the Far North, the reality when it comes to having such things going on. “At the end of the day”—listen to this—“I’d rather borrow money from Tony Soprano than from a payday lender. He treated his clients much more fairly and with more generosity....

“As I say, the debate should be about poverty in this province and this government’s failure to address it, not in any meaningful way but in any way, shape or form whatsoever. The government talks about it; there’s a lot of yakking going on about poverty. You don’t solve poverty by striking committees, giving more money to the United Way” once a year or having food banks. “You solve poverty by giving people the means to escape from it, like the right to join a trade union, among other things, like the right to card-based certification,” like a raise in the minimum wage to \$10.

Think about this, Mr. Speaker—oh, I’m sorry.

That was from 2008, by my good friend Peter Kormos. I think he deserves a round of applause, because he hit the nail on the head in 2008.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: This has gotten to be quite the debate.

It’s always a pleasure to address this House. I’m proud that our government has taken the initiative to regulate the payday loan industry, and I fully support this measure. While payday loans are superficially a good solution for those needing a small amount of financial assistance in a hurry, in practice they often take advantage, as the previous speaker said, of some of Ontario’s most vulnerable residents and push them into a cycle of debt.

This proposed legislation seeks to minimize the opportunity for predatory lending by creating a mandatory seven-day period between loans—allowing borrowers time to consider their options—and providing extended repayment plans to consumers taking out more than three loans in a two-month period.

I’m pleased that our government is taking steps to protect Ontarians from becoming trapped in a cycle of debt. If passed, Ontario would be a leader in Canada when it comes to protecting consumers from the risk of using alternative financial services. Reducing the risk of accessing these services supports our vision of Ontario marketplaces that are fair, safe and informed. I did listen, and someone said that you should cancel them altogether.

Ontarians should have a choice when it comes to their finances, and that includes the opportunity to access credit and other financial services.

The proposed law includes provisions related to cashing of government cheques, rent-to-own services, instalment loans and protection of consumers who have debts in collections.

We have listened to the people of this province, and I urge you to support this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton has two minutes.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I want to thank all the members for their questions and comments.

I really want to focus in on one comment. The door has been opened, so I think it’s important to address it. I want anyone who is listening from Newmarket–Aurora, any of the constituents in Newmarket–Aurora, to just focus in on this. Your member’s argument—and this is important, a logical argument. Let’s try to follow this through. Things that happened 26 years ago—26 years ago—he’s blaming a five-year majority. Think this through. He’s blaming a five-year majority 26 years ago for issues that are impacting people today, despite the fact that his government has been in power for 13 years and will be in power for two more years—a total of 15 years in power, close to two decades in power. The issue of predatory loans and the fact that they’re at over 500%—the government will have been in power for 15 years by 2018—somehow all of that is the fault of a five-year majority 26 years ago. I ask you all to think about the logic of that argument. I’m pretty sure that all the constituents of Newmarket–Aurora will not find that argument very cogent, very rational or very sensible. But that was the argument raised by your member from Newmarket–Aurora. So thank you to you all for this member’s amazing argument.

If you really want to address payday loans and if you consider them to be predatory—the issue of choice was raised by the member from Barrie. It’s not a real choice to choose interest rates of 500%. That’s an act of desperation.

We need to ensure that people are not being exploited when they’re desperate and that vulnerable people are not being taken advantage of. The real solution is to ensure that we have a hard cap on predatory loans and that they are not allowed to be 500%. They should be capped at 35%, like they’ve done in Quebec.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 6 o’clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 o’clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
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**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 21 April 2016

Jeudi 21 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 21 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 21 avril 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT (STRENGTHENING RETIREMENT SECURITY FOR ONTARIANS), 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE RÉGIME DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE DE L'ONTARIO (SÉCURISER LA RETRAITE EN ONTARIO)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 20, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 186, An Act to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 186, Loi établissant le Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When we last debated this issue, the member from York-Simcoe had the floor.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to continue on yesterday's theme.

Just to bring people together and understand where we were, the critical issues in this pension plan are the unintended consequences: the impact it will have on various members of society, not all of which are really in their best interests. There are a few key words that I think people need to be aware of as they try to understand what, in fact, is being recommended by the government—what is being pushed forward by the government.

First is the fact that this was designed for a very special group of people: those without workplace pensions. When that idea was floated, there were some studies that were done to determine who we were talking about and how long that was. But people recognize that there were a lot of part-time jobs where they had very little number of hours to work. So there was general sympathy, looking at how to respond to the problem of there being no workplace pensions.

But the signal light went on when that got floated among businesses through organizations such as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, who all then looked at their membership, who were able to point out that they're

stretched very thinly. There are so many people, frankly, who own businesses so they have a job, and there isn't much left over. In today's macro system, there is not much left over either, when you have the most debt of any subnational state in the world, with almost \$300 billion in debt, and it costs about \$11 billion for the servicing of that \$300 billion. That's the backdrop to this piece of legislation. It's the elephant in the room, so to speak. There's always a problem that that's there.

People in the private sector have recognized increases in the hydro rates, for instance, both at home and at work. They have recognized that in the last budget there has been a whole list of licences and fees and things that will be charged to the individual. The threat, I would argue, of a cap-and-trade carbon tax is looming on the horizon. The notion that an employer and employee would have to put forward 1.9% towards a pension fund—there are many businesses for which that is actually going to lead to a decrease in hours or to actual layoffs. That there is actually a number attached to the number of layoffs that this will trigger gives you a sense of the cruel irony that, without a job, you certainly can't be collecting a pension. For the people who might lose their jobs as a result of this initiative, this is a very real-life threat.

That was the initial area of concern. Then the government decided, as well, to introduce the notion of what's comparable. It took them several months to establish some parameters so that now this brings in a huge segment of the population that had no idea that they would be part of this pension for people who didn't have a workplace pension. I'm talking here about people who are employed in the private sector, who have pensions and who are relatively satisfied with that system as it is. It's an important economic driver in this province, the fact that private sector pensions are administered and held by banks and insurance companies and various other investment opportunities.

They now suddenly get sucked into this whole equation because they find themselves, the private sector businesses, now having to look and see whether or not they measure up to something called "comparable." "Comparable" in this context means that your pension is good enough; it's good enough for the government's definition. Without going into all of those details of the definition, the simplest one is to look at a defined contribution pension plan that is supported with less than 4% from each side. In other words, many pensions are "three and three": 3% by the employer and 3% by the employee. Now, all of a sudden, these people aren't deemed comparable and they would have to make alterations.

0910

The private sector is looking at itself in terms of what kind of changes that makes, and that's really, Madam Speaker, where we are today in terms of the ripple effect, if you like, of this bill. Suddenly people who had no idea that they would be drawn in—they understood it to be a bill that was for people who actually don't have a workplace pension, and I am sure they never imagined that they would be drawn into a very complicated exercise with the government, spread out over years. Businesses, then, are going to have to choose whether they join the ORPP, or can they can measure up to the rigours of being comparable?

Those are issues that still stand out in the discussion on this bill; there are many others. But I think you have to come back to the timing and the notion that we're going to have a payroll tax included in this province, just at a point when S&P dropped its credit grade—the lowest level ever. These are the kinds of things—I mentioned hydro rates, and certainly the spending scandals and the ever-rising debt. Into those situations now comes, for individuals who never imagined they were part of this, the need to look at this notion of “comparable.”

The other aspect of that, of course, is the impact of making it more costly to do business in this province, because any kind of payroll tax that is a job-killing one, which we know this to be, hinders the ability of the private sector to do what it does best: actually provide job opportunities for people and strengthen our economy to attract investment. I recently mentioned that Canada's economy is growing, but we must remain prudent and fiscally sound. To conjure up a further tax on Ontarians now will run the real risk of adverse effects. Outside of recession, this is the worst possible time to enact a \$3.5-billion payroll tax.

As I mentioned earlier, Ontario is the largest sub-national debtor in the entire world—just over \$21,000 for every single person in Ontario. Net debt to GDP has gone up nearly 50% under the Liberal government. Last year, due to poor policies like this, interest totalled \$11.4 billion. After major funding allocations like health care and education, that is the government's largest expenditure. I'm sure it would surprise many Ontarians if they really found out how much they are paying just in interest on the provincial debt. It averages \$840 per person—that could be a rent payment for many working Ontarians—yet this cost just keeps on rising each year.

Ontario businesses already feel immense pressure, especially with out-of-province competition. With more regulations, hydro rate increases and the newly proposed mutual payroll tax, businesses are being forced to reconsider investing in Ontario. I know, in conversations with my own constituents who have businesses that may employ 25 people—those are deemed small business, and certainly in the grand scheme of things, they are. But there comes a point when the regulatory burden and the tax burden just make it so that there's not much incentive to continue. So Ontario's businesses face serious trouble as the province has no will to levy any taxation support.

Businesses just won't have the capital to handle the financial blow and will be forced to close their doors.

We see a government that would rather squeeze more money from a small business by any means necessary, including a new mandatory pension tax. But I must repeat: Businesses can only pay these when they make a profit. Businesses can only hire more employees and grow if the government allows them to do so. It is no longer a secret that each and every day, companies choose to pass Ontario by and find jurisdictions where growth is possible.

This brings us back to this ill-conceived plan that can further risk the state of the economy. The ORPP has continually evolved as potential revenue, continually growing as it looks to pool as much revenue as possible, even if it means giving up a better plan.

We all know that it's impossible to save for retirement if you have no job. As I explained yesterday, the government has no true need to squeeze Ontarians any further. The mandatory nature of this plan will jeopardize some of the most vulnerable by taking away what they spend each and every day on food, clothes and ever-increasing bills, for the benefits to be clawed back from them 40 years from now.

There are many other successful forms of savings plans, such as the pooled registered pension plan. In 2013, before this government decided to pay attention to the issue of retirement security, our PC caucus was hard at work. It was three years ago when I brought forth Bill 50, An Act to require the introduction of legislation to allow for pooled registered pension plans. This plan, contrary to the mandatory Ontario plan, is a retirement savings option for individuals, including self-employed individuals. Another example of how the pooled registered pension is superior is that it enables its members to benefit from lower administration costs that result from participating in a large, pooled pension plan. It's also portable, which is something that the Ontario one is not, which raises unanswered questions with regard to moving out of the province, having an employer that is a national employer, not a provincial one; whereas the pooled pension goes with the individual from job to job. You're also able to go to participating provinces, like British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Quebec. Since the investment options within a pooled registered plan are similar to those for other registered pension plans, its members can benefit from greater flexibility in managing their savings and meeting their retirement objectives.

As a result of the repeated mismanagement and the growing infrastructure deficit, the Ontario Liberals are running out of ways to fund projects and political promises. By looking at the numbers, one can easily see the alarming pattern. For anyone counting, the new cap-and-trade scheme is estimated to take up \$2 billion a year, not to mention another \$4 billion from the sale of Hydro One.

Keeping with this theme, the expected billions a year in revenue they plan to create through the Ontario pension plan by imposing the method of a payroll tax on

employers and employees who don't have private plans deemed adequate for their retirement—the real reason is the need for capital. When you look at the management of money since coming to power in 2003, the government has increased Ontario's debt by 115%, from \$138.8 billion to \$298.9 billion, and Ontario's debt-to-GDP ratio from a healthy 27% to an alarming 39%. More money is spent on interest on debt than on any other government function except for health and education. Ontario's credit rating has been downgraded, which makes it more expensive to borrow money.

0920

Finally, as a recent Fraser Institute report noted, since the 2008 recession, 66% of the debt the government has piled up has gone to meet government operating expenses as opposed to being invested in capital projects. The real reason that this is a cash grab is because of the need to find capital money.

I mentioned how the program has evolved, from people who weren't employed, then to help seniors. But seniors who are retired are obviously not eligible, and low-income retirees are already supplemented through OAS and GIS. Actually, they stand to hit the ceiling on their ability to collect OAS and GIS, so they actually would be clawed back.

It's also important to know who is in and who is out. As a result of federal jurisdiction and federal income tax pension rules, individuals such as the self-employed and First Nations will be exempted. The big development in the government's latest announcement was that those employees who are not crown federally regulated workers or individuals who work in industries like marine, airlines and airports, telecommunications, railways, and anyone who works with a crown corporation will be exempt as well.

This leaves about four million working in Ontario, who will be split into two distinct groups: those who have some type of pension benefit that will be put to the government test of an annual contribution rate at 4% for each employee and employer, respectively, totalling a yearly contribution of 8%; and those who have no pension with their employer, to which individual employees and employers will be forced to contribute at an annual rate of 1.9%.

In the time I have left, I think it's really important that people understand how much more complex this has evolved from looking after those people without a workplace pension. While there's a great deal more I could say, I just want to indicate how difficult it is for the average Ontarian who looks for his government to provide stability in his community and now is looking at the increased cost of living beyond being able to remain optimistic and hopeful.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: On the NDP side of the House, we want every worker in this province to have a good pension plan: a pension plan that allows them to retire with dignity, a pension plan that allows them to retire

free of the stress of, "How will I pay the ever-increasing hydro bill? How will I pay the ever-increasing gas prices at the pump?"

When the Liberals started talking about the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, it looked like they were going in that direction: It was going to be for all workers, very similar to the CPP. Don't get me wrong: If we could have an add-on to the CPP, that would be very much preferable than starting a new pension plan. I would add to this that any deviations from the CPP that we do with the ORPP, positive or negative, will make it harder later on to make sure we merge the two.

The CPP covers every single worker in Canada; the ORPP won't. When we look at the list of who is included versus the list of who is excluded, let's just say that the exclusions are way, way more than who is in. That's not what we bargained for. What we bargained for is to make sure that every worker could retire with dignity and would have a stable amount of revenue coming to them in their old age, so that they can live their lives without worrying about not being able to make an income anymore, because they would have a pension coming in. We are going further and further away from the stated goal.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, I want to make it clear that our government has made this plan one of the pillars of our economic plan going forward because we believe that every worker deserves to have a secure retirement. That's why we've done it.

The plan is going to close the retirement savings gap for those two thirds of Ontario employees who do not have a workplace pension. The gap is even worse for younger people, because three quarters of Ontario workers between the ages of 25 and 34 do not have a workplace pension, and they will never have one, practically speaking.

What the bill does, to address this gap, is provide employers and employees with a period of time and clarity that they're going to need to prepare for the launch of the plan. The enrolment is going to start in January 2017, and the collection of contributions will begin the following January, in 2018.

Another feature of the plan, and a necessary feature of the plan, is accountability. The plan is designed to be sustainable for the long term. The act will establish a formal funding policy guide to guide the actions of the plan and to ensure that the government, in the event of a funding shortfall or excess, can take actions to adjust the plan.

We want to support that transparency and accountability regarding the sustainability of the plan, and in doing so, we are committed this fall to introduce legislation that will introduce the office of the chief actuary. That's a very, very important feature of the plan, because the criticism has been, from some quarters, that somehow the money is going to flow into general revenues and so forth and so on. The office of the chief actuary will make sure that plan operates independently.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I always appreciate hearing from the member from York-Simcoe about the pension plan, because she is very knowledgeable in the pros and cons of an Ontario Registered Pension Plan.

A few things weren't really touched on today. Many people have fantastic pension plans with their companies, and this government is not making the assurances that are needed to ensure that those plans will be in place and they won't lose their excellent pension plans for a lesser plan provided by the government. Those plans are very well invested. Companies are not going to be able to hold onto private pension plans as well as a public pension plan, so they're going to ditch the private pension plans, which in many cases are better plans and working very well. The old adage is, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." We are concerned that there are a lot of people who will be worse off with this Ontario Registered Pension Plan.

The other factor is about investments. We all know that the Canada Pension Plan is very well invested all over the world. In fact, they invest in York region, in many projects right in the region. We are very concerned because it was very clear in previous budgets that this government plans to invest in their infrastructure projects with this pension plan. That has raised a lot of red flags and a lot of concern in many areas.

Yes, people need help saving for their retirement—we all realize that—but too many Ontarians are retiring with debt, and not just the burden of the provincial debt, which will cost them in many different ways, but the burden of their own debt. That's something that this plan doesn't address. I am concerned that many people will see this as another excuse to take on more debt. That's certainly not what we want to see.

The concerns are there, and I think that we need a lot more discussion.

0930

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's good to have a couple of minutes to talk about this issue again. New Democrats believe that every worker in this province should have a good pension, preferably defined benefit protection, so that when they do retire they can be sure that they're going to have a stable income for those 30- to 40-plus years that people are living today.

Michael Prue, the former member from Beaches-East York, was here yesterday, and I got to spend a little bit of time with him. He's in that retirement mode now. Here at the Legislative Assembly we have an RPP, somewhat similar to what is being proposed in an ORPP, but it's market dependent and it's not a defined benefit plan, so if the stock market is doing well, you might do well.

Michael tells me that after 13 years of serving here, following time as the mayor of East York and on Toronto city council—at a time when you couldn't participate in the OMERS plan so there was nothing coming out of there—the money that was in his fund here at the Legis-

lative Assembly is just what was put in. There isn't very much more money there because of the ups and downs in the market. In his retirement, he's going to have to be very careful with whatever money he has coming out of that, while with a defined-benefit plan he could have counted on whatever that looked like—\$1,000 a month or \$1,200 a month.

While this is a good step to get something in place, I don't think it is the best result for Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from York-Simcoe to wrap up.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much. I appreciate the comments of the member from Nickel Belt, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the members from Thornhill and Welland. I'm very pleased with the comments that were made, generally, in the sense that they recognize the complexity of this issue and the fact that this was begun as a response for those people with no workplace pension.

It has now morphed into—actually, the budget itself talked about a flow of money coming from the pension to help with roads and bridges and things like that. The government made the comment itself. But it also has created an uncertainty in the area around a comparable pension and the kinds of decisions, as some of the observers commented on—that people are going to find themselves downgraded in their pension simply because the private sector isn't going to be able to make the kind of steps necessary to meet that comparable goal.

There are many issues that have to be addressed by the government as this bill proceeds and as more and more people understand that it's a mandatory process and there's an issue around comparability.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Here we are again debating the ORPP. This is the third bill of four on the proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Bill 186, An Act to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, outlines the broad details and fleshes out the plan but, really, if you have been following along with the announcements, as I am sure you have, there isn't too much that is new.

Interestingly, some of the information that we learned through the big and enthusiastic announcements along the way are not in this bill. Those details will be left to regulation. Frankly, Speaker, there is a lot that will be left to regulation.

Just to recap, the first bill, of three so far, was to allow for the ORPP to exist. It was a piece of enabling legislation. The second bill established the ORPP Administration Corp. and laid out its role. This third piece now presents more of the details of the plan.

Everyone in the province of Ontario deserves to retire with dignity and deserves to share in the benefits of an Ontario public pension plan. We wish that this plan included everyone, but instead of being a strong, public, universal plan to benefit all Ontarians, this government has continued to exclude more and more people.

This bill lays out which plans will be considered comparable and therefore left out of this plan. In the beginning, the government, in their discussion paper, had said that comparable, and therefore exempt, might mean solid, defined benefit plans. However, as we see here, it is now DB, DC, MEPP and—wait for it—PRPPs. Speaker, I would like to point out that PRPPs don't even exist yet. But as you know, we've debated these bank products in this House, and they are on the horizon. But this government says some of them will be considered comparable and therefore exempt.

You know, Speaker, this has really been quite a session for the big banks, if we stop to take stock—no pun intended. Between PRPP legislation and the sell-off of Hydro One, banks have really made out like bandits with this very generous Liberal government. If only this Liberal government were as motivated to ensure the financial well-being of all everyday, hard-working Ontarians.

We want retirement security for everyone. We want people to be able to count on predictable and fair benefits after a lifetime of working. This government talks a good game about retirement security. They want Ontarians to be covered in their retirement. However, we have only been hearing this messaging when it comes to the proposed shiny and new ORPP.

We need to think about the future, of course, but why is this government silent on the issue of pension security when it comes to existing pensions? Pensioners across the province—across the country—are worried about the security of their pensions and their benefits. All that we have to do is look at what has been happening to benefit plans and pensioners in Hamilton. Their benefits have been attacked, their pensions are targeted and their future and security is in jeopardy. What does the government think about that? What do they think about the amount that would be covered by the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund? What are their thoughts on the fact that pensioners hang from the bottom rung when it comes to bankruptcy? Speaker, bankruptcy might be a federal issue, but our provincial industries and provincial workers, friends, neighbours and constituents are affected.

This government doesn't seem to have an opinion when it comes to protecting existing pensioners. We can't only talk about the shiny, new plan we can cut the ribbon for; we must pay attention to existing plans and pensioners. Speaker, I challenge this government to do just that.

This government wanted to create a plan modelled after the CPP, and assured us that it could be integrated or rolled into the CPP. I spent time in committee, and I asked about that. I asked why they put their opinion on the design of CPP enhancement into their provincial budget. It is in this provincial government's opinion that a future CPP enhancement should be a targeted enhancement made in the image of their own ORPP.

"Targeted," incidentally, does not mean universal, Madam Speaker. We should be working to strengthen our universal programs that support everyone, not outlining ways to undermine and undercut them.

So, as always, it is my pleasure to rise in this Legislature and speak about my constituents in Oshawa, but

because we're discussing pension issues again today, I appreciate my role as pension critic for our caucus and to be able to speak to these issues that affect all Ontarians. I think it's important that we always come back to the importance of ensuring Ontarians are afforded the opportunity to retire with dignity. It has actually become one of my favourite topics of discussion, so I appreciate the opportunity to speak at length to this this morning.

Speaker, as I noted earlier, this is the third piece of legislation pertaining to the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. It's also the third bill that I've had the opportunity to speak to at length in this chamber. I do one-hour leads, as you know, as critic, so to have three pieces is six hours, and if you factor in the PRPP legislation, that's eight. And then I found out that there's going to be a fourth bill on the ORPP.

Mr. Wayne Gates: No way. No.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Really. Wait for it; there will be. So, lots of talk about pensions, which is wonderful. It's wonderful that Ontarians are learning so much about the importance of having a pension.

0940

Ms. Cindy Forster: Lots of talk; no action.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: But to my colleague's point, we have lots of opportunities to talk, and while that's always important, the most important part is the action piece.

We've spoken about the details, from broad strokes right down to the minutia, and as we're getting closer to the launch date, the more important these details become. Seeing as this is the final piece of legislation before the government hammers out all of the remaining significant design details and regulations all by their lonesome behind closed doors; maybe at the kitchen table with a napkin, I don't know—

Mr. Wayne Gates: A big napkin.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: A big napkin—a place mat. I'd like to take the opportunity today to look back at where we started on some of the finer points, to look at where we've landed on them and to look at what remains to be decided.

As I have said many times before in this Legislature, when it comes to this government, the devil is in the details, so it is important as opposition members and critics that we take a good hard look at where this plan is headed.

When we first started this discussion about our concerns regarding the ORPP, we spoke a lot about the consultation process, or the lack thereof; the fact this is a non-universal plan that will leave millions of Ontarians excluded; our concern that by excluding Ontarians and complicating the plan, this government is seriously jeopardizing the potential for future CPP expansion; and what this will mean for all Canadians.

We have spoken about the definition surrounding comparability and what would and should be considered comparable about portability; the minimum income or earnings threshold; whether the investment body would be at arm's length or in the kitchen; or if the government

was looking to privatize the delivery model, like they have privatized so many other important public assets and programs.

We asked whether experts and stakeholders were being included in every step of the conversation or if you were compromising the plan by caving to external pressures. We asked about PRPPs, DBs, DCs and the PBGF. The pension community seems to have a good solid love of a good solid acronym. I've learned to love them too, Madam Speaker.

Finally, we asked about where the security, strength and reliability of existing pension plans fit into the government agenda, or if we should all just get distracted by the shiny and the new.

These are all important conversations, and while I start to think that they're all talked out, at some point the government continues to fail us on so many of these issues. They continue to delay and diminish, water down, and walk away.

Let's not forget that these decisions have real consequences on real Ontarians' real lives. It's easy to get lost in the bubble of this very impressive and important building some days. But the decisions that the government makes are what are really important. They affect how people will live in retirement or how they will plan for their futures, and they will continue to affect them for generations to come.

That's why we need to make sure we get it right, now. That's why the government should be listening to the experts around them. I'm certainly not one of them myself, but I've met with as many of them as I can find and let me tell you, there are some smart people in the pension community and they are smart people with their hearts in the right place, too. People with expertise and the best of intentions and hearts in the right places are not people who are easy to find. But I hope that the government, now that they have them in their circles, are taking their advice more diligently than we saw during the ORPP consultation process.

We are getting down to the nitty-gritty now, and the clock is ticking. Of course, the government has—I can't read this morning. Just a second. Regroup. An hour is a long time even though this is like hour number 7. Are you waiting with bated breath? How many of you know what I might say?

Where was I? I'm just giving the government a hard time. We need to have pension security. Okay. Nitty-gritty; right. Clock is ticking.

Of course the government also has the ability to simply turn back time, as they did just recently by delaying the phase-in by a full year. It's important to note that this delay was only for the first phase of the employers, which is compromised of the largest corporations in the country. The government seems pretty content reassuring Ontarians that enhanced retirement security cannot wait when they are glossing over the consultation process, but they were quick to hit the brakes when their friends on Bay Street interjected. Stop me when you've heard this before. They say "Jump" and you say "How high?" Oh,

and smaller businesses are apparently more equipped to adjust to the plan and make adjustments for the plan, so the delay only pertains to the largest employers.

Delays and adjustment are okay. We do want governments to adjust their plans as they gather new information or as needed. It just seems convenient the new information seems to always come from the same place and consistently benefit the same people, while Ontarians wait to hear what compromise is next to come.

Let me remind you, Madam Speaker, that New Democrats are supportive of a strong public pension plan. We recognize that Ontarians need the kind of fundamental change that will address a fundamentally changing workplace. Part of that involves ensuring that all workers in the province have a pension plan. No one should be left behind. But we want to make sure that it is done right, that it is the best plan.

Everybody in the province deserves to retire with dignity and to share in the benefits of an Ontario public pension plan. We are, however, concerned that the legislation doesn't align with previous Liberal promises, in all of the ways that I have already discussed and more.

We hope that the Premier will continue to push the federal Liberal government to expand the Canada Pension Plan. Like everyone else, we are waiting to see if the Prime Minister delivers on this campaign promise and to see exactly what an enhanced CPP will look like.

As you all know, the CPP is a universal plan that covers all Canadians, including those working for the federal government and the self-employed, while the ORPP is targeted towards those workers who don't have a comparable workplace pension plan.

It is important that we remember that any departure of the ORPP from the CPP will make it difficult to integrate the ORPP into a future and potential CPP enhancement. If the government truly prioritizes strengthening retirement income security for all Ontarians, then in addition to the ORPP it should be making sure that Ontario pensioners and pensioners across Canada are put first. That means working towards a CPP enhancement, and it means protecting the security of existing plans as they continue to fall under siege.

These are troubling facts, Madam Speaker, and ones that should not be taken lightly. All Ontarians deserve to retire with dignity, and we are heard to remind the government that "all Ontarians" is not a definition that the government can rework as they see fit. "All Ontarians" means all Ontarians.

Mr. Wayne Gates: All is all.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Right.

Let's start with details of the legislation that we have in front of us and then we can get back into the larger discussion of our concerns and what improvements the government needs to make.

First, as I mentioned earlier, we are concerned that the legislation doesn't align with previous Liberal promises. Now, I know that you and many people outside of this chamber are shocked to hear that the government's promises are not always reflected in legislation, but there it is.

Finding a way to duck out of their promises within legislation is actually kind of their specialty, and it doesn't go unnoticed.

In August of 2015, the government put out a release that said, "Our goal is for every employee in Ontario to be part of the ORPP or a comparable workplace pension plan by 2020." In January of 2016, however, the government's press release read, "Today's announcement brings the government closer to achieving its goal of ensuring that every eligible Ontario employee is part of the ORPP or a comparable workplace pension plan by 2020." Hmm.

The legislation now confirms that a number of groups will neither have a workplace pension nor be a part of the ORPP. Given the close relationship between the federal and provincial governments, it's unclear why a consensus has not been reached or cannot be reached.

In January 2016, Minister Sousa said, "We have a mandate from Ontarians, and they can't wait any longer" for increased retirement security. In February of 2016, and now in legislation, it was announced that the first phase of contributions will begin in January 2018, not in 2017, as previously promised—a win for the business community.

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In August 2015, the calculation of pension benefits was said to be based on a maximum of \$90,000 in 2014 dollars. I'm going to say that again: \$90,000 in 2014 dollars. Legislation shows that this is now \$90,000 in 2017 dollars. Under the Liberals' previous promise, in 2014 dollars, the maximum pensionable earnings would have been nearly \$93,000 by 2017. We know that the greater the amount of money used in the calculation of pension benefits, the greater the future payout for Ontarians. So right out of the gate, we're starting at \$90,000, we're keeping it at \$90,000, but now we've changed from 2014 dollars to 2017 dollars, and we're just shaving some of that benefit right off the top.

Budget 2016 states, "The province's extensive consultations in developing the ORPP have helped to inform Ontario's view that a CPP enhancement must be timely and provide a level of adequacy and targeted coverage that is consistent with the ORPP." You'll find that on page 151 of the budget, if you're interested. It appears that the targeted approach of the ORPP will inform any potential enhancement of the CPP, when it should be the other way around. It should be, as they had said initially, that the ORPP would be modelled after the CPP, but now we see in the budget that it's the CPP enhancement that they want to see modelled after the ORPP. What remains unclear is whether the ORPP will in fact jeopardize the universality inherent in the CPP. That's a pretty significant concern to leave up to the whims of the government on any given day at any given kitchen table.

Madam Speaker, as I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, I appreciate the opportunity, and I'm always humbled to stand in this chamber and speak at length about an issue that is so significant to all Ontarians and to our province as a whole. I am honoured to speak on behalf of the New Democrats and the rich history of sup-

port our party has shown to the pension movement in Ontario and across the country.

In 2009, New Democrats reached out to constituents all over the province to learn directly from Ontarians about what changes were needed in Ontario's retirement system. While those consultations were more than just window dressing, unlike the government's recent round of consultations, we ultimately came to the same conclusion. Despite the fact that the government opted not to support the Ontario retirement plan as proposed by the New Democratic Party in early 2010, we are pleased to see that they've come around and found the value in this concept and the need for proactive action. Our work on fairness issues such as retirement security is what first attracted me to this party, and it's because of the core principle of collective good that I am a New Democrat.

As a teacher, I was fortunate enough to find myself in an occupation that provided a good and reliable pension, and as a New Democrat, I believe that that opportunity should be extended to all people.

As New Democrats, we have always believed and will always believe that all Ontarians should have access to a strong defined benefit pension plan, and for those that don't have one, it is our duty as representatives of this province to provide it.

Back to the legislation at hand: This bill follows a number of announcements made by the government over the course of the last year, as previously mentioned, and contains design elements related to contributions, benefits, plan sustainability and protection of funds, as well as administrative compliance and enforcement matters—lots of stuff. Additional plan design details, however, including those that have been previously announced, will be contained in regulations to come.

Let's start with contributions, or who's included, or, more significantly, who is excluded. Starting with inclusions—and if you're not familiar with the plan, here's a chance to learn: Ontarians aged 18 to 70 are eligible to participate in the ORPP. Therefore, the maximum period during which a plan member may contribute to the ORPP will be 52 years. Because you must have a job to be in the plan, which is another problem the government should pay more attention to—a person is considered employed in Ontario whether they work full-time or part-time, as long as they meet the minimum earning threshold of \$3,500, if they are paid from an Ontario-based employer and meet all other definitions to qualify.

For the exclusions: Ontarians working for the federal government. It is important to note that government jobs don't always offer workplace pensions, particularly for—I need water. Just a second. I know I can talk for an hour, but normally I breathe.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Take your time.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the notes as to how much time is left. Thank you. Are you not enjoying learning about pensions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, it's great. It's the fifth time I've learned.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The seventh.

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm being heckled from the other side. Pensions are among my favourite topics.

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes, yes. In the New Democratic Party, we wear many hats and we care about all issues that are important to Ontarians.

Back to the exclusions: Who is left out of this plan? Ontarians working for the federal government are left out of this plan. It's important to note that government jobs don't always offer workplace pensions, particularly for those who are hired on a temporary or seasonal basis. For example, the Toronto Star recently found that 44% of the 10,682 jobs posted and filled in Ontario ministries in 2013-14 were temporary or seasonal, not including student summer jobs. That is a significant number, Madam Speaker, and it represents a large group of Ontarians that will be left to fend for themselves outside of this plan.

Another group excluded: employees already receiving an ORPP pension. Sounds a bit confusing: employees who are already receiving the ORPP pension benefit. As I mentioned earlier, Ontarians aged 18 to 70 are eligible to participate. For example, if someone is 70 but decided not to retire and to continue working—after 70, they will be collecting a pension. They are being excluded going forward.

This provision is unlike the recent changes introduced to the CPP. For individuals under 65 who are working while receiving their CPP retirement benefit, both the employee and employer will have to make CPP contributions. These contributions will increase the employee's CPP retirement benefits. For individuals aged 65 to 70 who are working while receiving their CPP retirement pension, employees can choose to make CPP contributions. These contributions will increase the employee's CPP retirement benefits. Under the ORPP, however, as I mentioned, these individuals will be unable to continue to contribute to the plan even should they continue to work past the age of 70.

Employees with earnings exempt under a tax treaty—for example, temporary foreign workers—are excluded. Also excluded: on-reserve First Nations workers, unless both the employer and employee elect otherwise. Also excluded: individuals who object to participation in the ORPP on religious grounds, which does mirror the CPP. Also excluded: an employee who takes a leave—for example, pregnancy, parental, personal emergency, family caregiver or family medical—under the Employment Standards Act, unless employees elect otherwise.

Most importantly, other groups to be determined under regulations will be excluded: those who are self-employed and those employed in areas under federal jurisdiction; for example, airlines, banks, post offices, radio and television stations, and interprovincial railways.

That was technical. But Speaker, this barely skims the surface of who will be excluded from the plan. Those are the technical exclusions. Now let's talk about everybody else.

As the government continues to expand the definition of what constitutes a comparable workplace pension

plan, we're going to see more and more people left out and excluded. While it might seem alarmist to assume that they are going to continue to expand that definition—far be it from me to be an alarmist—we've watched them do it again and again with the announcements over the past year, so I think it's a pretty fair assumption. But more on that later.

This bill also sets up some of the details surrounding contributions. However, much is left to regulation—so again with the technical. Contributory pensionable earnings are to be determined under regulations, with the following specifications: above the minimum earnings threshold of \$3,500; below the maximum earnings threshold of \$90,000 in 2017 dollars, as I mentioned—no longer, as previously announced, in 2014 dollars. This amount will be adjusted for inflation.

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At this time, it is unclear if pensionable earnings will include both cash and non-cash earnings, including amounts beyond base salaries such as bonuses and commissions. We know that that will be left to regulations as well. In fairness, I asked about this in committee, but until we've seen it in writing—we'll wait for it in regulations.

As we know, an equal contribution rate of 1.9% will be phased in for both employers and employees based on firm size. This amount may be adjusted to ensure plan sustainability. Madam Speaker, as I noted earlier, the timeline of the phase-in period has been adjusted once already, so we hope that the government is not going to feel inspired to further delay and further diminish.

This bill also stipulates a number of the duties of contributing employers, which include paying contributions on behalf of their eligible workers to the ORPP Administration Corp., collecting and remitting contributions from those workers, and keeping prescribed records.

This bill elaborates on the benefits under the plan, including: A member is entitled to be paid a lifetime pension from the ORPP. It will be paid in equal monthly instalments upon retirement. The annual amount of a member's pension, once it starts being paid out, will be equal to the total of the pension benefits the member has accrued. This is calculated by multiplying a benefit accrual rate of 0.375% by the member's pensionable earnings for the year.

Are you learning your technical details now? Okay.

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The other side is happy.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm saying what's in the plan, so yes—without political commentary.

The 0.375% has been determined based on a targeted income replacement rate of 15%.

If it's a joint and survivor pension, the amount of the pension will be actuarially equivalent—that's actuarially a hard word to say—to the value of a non-joint and survivor pension.

Upon the death of the member, the pension payable to the member's surviving spouse will be 60% of the pension paid to the member during their joint lives. As a

further definition included within the act, a spouse is defined as either of two persons who are married to each other or in a common-law relationship.

Pension benefits can be received when the member turns 60 at the earliest; at the latest, the pension benefits will be paid at 70, and the ORPP will begin paying benefits in 2022. Under special circumstances, the pension can be paid out earlier.

In order to make further contributions to the ORPP as an employee, a member who is being paid the pension may elect to suspend the payment of the pension. As you may expect, the amount of the resumed pension is to be determined under regulations. Everything seems to be going to be determined under regulations. I actually feel like “to be determined under regulations” could be this government’s catchphrase. It seems to give them the wiggle room that they so desperately need and it lets them punt the ball just a little further down the field so they can deal with it later. Unfortunately, it means that we are forced to wait and trust the government, which I’ve learned in my time here is not an advisable idea. That’s not a good idea.

When we trust the government, they tell us things like, “We have no intention of selling Ontario’s assets,” and then we find Hydro One on the chopping block just a few months later. Perhaps “Ontario for sale” could also be another applicable catchphrase for this government. But once again, I digress.

Speaker, I have laid out a number of details, and there are more. But do you know what? I’m going to stop because I’m tired of reading the specifics here.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Aw.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I know the minister was enjoying that, and that’s also really why I’m stopping.

As you can see and as you have heard, we’ve received some further details but we await the mountain of regulations to come and hope that the government doesn’t look for new ways to water down the plan and exclude more Ontarians while we wait.

Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, it is my privilege and responsibility to speak, as the NDP critic for pensions, on behalf of the two thirds of Ontarians who do not have a workplace pension, and to speak for those who deserve to feel secure in their retirement.

I also speak for the yet-to-be-determined number of Ontarians who are going to be left out of this plan and who are being excluded from this opportunity—Ontarians who could benefit from this plan, just as the plan could benefit from their enrolment; but alas, it will not.

Pensions have always been a vital piece of our economic stability and cornerstone of financial security in retirement. Ontarians deserve the right to retire with dignity, and the next generation is not going to be taken care of. That’s why something does have to be done. That’s why New Democrats advocated for an enhanced public pension system for years. Two thirds of Ontarians don’t have a workplace pension. Some Ontarians with insufficient workplace pensions still will struggle into retirement.

It’s difficult to imagine that the majority of our aging population will not have the resources to pay their own way, to afford housing, to buy necessities, to contribute to the economy or to live with dignity. That’s a pretty grim reality that we’re facing. Just the other day I had the opportunity to speak about predatory lending; when we are reminded of the financial opportunities or financial options for individuals living in communities that struggle or are in significant need—when those are their financial options, we wonder why retirement is not something that they can plan for—or rather we don’t wonder. When we see that those are their avenues, we realize we need to be building ways forward.

We have a retirement savings crisis in Ontario. We know that. Whether we’re talking about retiring seniors, those in the prime of their working lives, or the next crop of workers to come, we really do need to do more. In 2012, the median income for Ontarians over 65 was \$26,720, or \$2,227 per month. Putting that in perspective, the average monthly cost for seniors’ housing in Ontario last year was over \$2,750. That’s more than \$500 short every month. That’s only taking housing into account, and that’s using average numbers; that’s not using real people and real specifics. People are struggling, and we cannot allow this to be the future for our seniors.

And that’s our seniors. What about our youth? The government simply isn’t doing enough to address youth employment in this province, and that is immensely worrying. Talk is cheap. We talked earlier about—we talk and talk and talk. We’ve been talking about pension security; we’ve been talking about retirement security. The number of hours that we have spent in this Legislature focusing on the ORPP—if we could spend a fraction of that time speaking about the strategy to address youth unemployment, imagine what we could talk about. Then we’d have to put that into action.

As I said, talk is cheap. Not only do we need to take action now, but we have to plan for the future. How on earth can our youth, without stable employment—or sometimes without any employment—start to save for retirement when they can’t even pay their tuition bills today, when they can’t pay for child care and when they can’t find affordable housing? Debt continues to balloon, jobs just don’t appear, and future stability is not on the horizon. If their own government doesn’t have a strong plan for the future, how on earth can the youth of today be expected to plan for themselves?

I’m pleased to serve Ontario, as I said, as the NDP pension critic. I fully appreciated and enjoyed attempting to hold this Liberal government to account when it comes to the future financial stability of workers, whether they’re General Motors pensioners in my riding of Oshawa or Ontarians across all of our constituencies.

How am I for time?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. It’s a lot easier just to relax into an hour and know you’ve got the full time, and not be sort of waiting. But I will continue.

We implore this government to design and implement a progressive public pension plan for hard-working people

across Ontario who deserve one, and stop focusing on exceptions and exemptions, and focusing on helping more Ontarians. Since the beginning of these conversations, we've been essentially begging them to bring more people in who they wouldn't consider universal. They wanted to leave others out and try and make everyone happy, and the thing is that when you try and make everyone happy, nobody's really happy at all. We could have had an opportunity here to bring everyone in to really create something strong, universal and public, but anyway, that wasn't their choice.

As we said before, all Ontarians—and that isn't a changeable definition: "All" means "all"—deserve the right to retire with dignity. I am here today to remind the government to keep this principle at the forefront as we continue to debate the details of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

As I said, Madam Speaker, New Democrats are supportive of a public pension plan. We recognize that Ontarians need the kind of fundamental change that will address a fundamentally changing workplace, that will keep up with the fundamentally increasing cost of living. Part of that involves ensuring that all workers in the province have a pension plan and that no one should be left behind. Everybody in the province deserves to retire with dignity and to share in the benefits of an Ontario public pension plan.

As I've said before, we are concerned that the legislation doesn't align with what the Liberals had previously promised in terms of eligibility and in terms of implementation timelines and benefit payments.

We hope that the Premier, as I've said, will continue to push their federal counterparts—their federal cousins—to expand the Canada Pension Plan. Like everyone else, we are waiting to see if the Prime Minister does actually follow through. We're waiting to see what the CPP enhancement might look like.

The CPP is a universal plan. I keep coming back to that because the ORPP is not. The CPP is a universal plan that covers all Canadians, including those working for the federal government and the self-employed. The ORPP is targeted towards those workers who don't have a comparable workplace pension plan.

It is important to recognize, though, that all of the deviations, all of the ways that the ORPP differs from the CPP, whether it's tiny little design detail or a broader piece, are going to make it more difficult to integrate—seamlessly or otherwise, but even potentially to integrate at all—into a future CPP enhancement. I keep coming back to it: If this government truly prioritized strengthening retirement income security for all Ontarians, then in addition to the ORPP, it really should be making sure that Ontario pensioners are put first. If they really do want to strengthen security in retirement for Ontarians and Canadians, they should bear that in mind: that as they're putting forward these details, that's going to have an impact on that future CPP enhancement.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to stand to talk about pensions. I thank the minister for putting forward yet

another bill for us to debate at length and for the opportunity to speak today. Coming out of the public sector—specifically, education—I do know the value of a pension. Pensioners know the value of a pension. Those who work and wonder how they will survive or thrive after their working years know the value of a pension.

I appreciate that I have come to the end of my time for today, and I look forward to continuing my remarks about the importance of pensions in Ontario. As I've said, this is such an important conversation—one of my favourites to have. Thank you for the time today, Madam Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing as it's almost 10:15, we're going to recess the House until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to introduce Lori Synes Taraba, a volunteer with the Niagara cancer society. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, to my pleasant surprise, some of our friends from the Turkish community are present in the members' east gallery, led by the new Turkish consul general, Erdeniz Şen. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to welcome from my riding Carole Watson and Nancy Irving, with the Canadian Cancer Society, hiding away at the back. Welcome.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to introduce two young students from the University of Windsor who are here today with the Canadian Cancer Society: Kamal Mann and Lindsey Bakos. Thank you for being here. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to acknowledge our page captain, Christina Vadivelu, this morning. Her mother, Ramya, and father, Clement, are here in the gallery to see their daughter in action. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Patrick Brown: It's a pleasure to introduce Senator Thanh Ngo, who has been an inspiration to Vietnamese Canadians. He's here with us today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome, Senator. Further introductions?

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's a great pleasure for me to introduce Mark Donahue, Alison Payne and Kendra Willis from the cancer society of Peterborough. They're in the east public gallery today.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm very pleased to be able to recognize representatives of the following organizations who are here today to celebrate Journey to Freedom Day: The Republic of Vietnam Veterans Association of Ontario; the Vietnamese Association Toronto; the Vietnamese Canadian Federation; the Vietnamese Association of Kitchener-Waterloo-Guelph-Cambridge; the Vietnamese Women's Association of Toronto; Golden Age Village for the Elderly; the Elderly Vietnamese Association of Mississauga; the Vietnamese Canadian Voting and Advocacy Association; VOICE Canada; Free Vietnamese Canadian Community Association of Ottawa; the Com-

mittee to Support Vietnam's Human Rights and Democracy; Alliance for Democracy in Vietnam, Canada chapter; Phan Boi Chau youth organization; the Vietnamese Canadian Pharmacists' Association of Toronto; Phap Van Vietnamese Buddhist Cultural Centre of Ontario; Vietnamese Hoa Hao Buddhism in Greater Toronto Area; Hoa Tinh Thuong Toronto; and Quang Ngai Friendship Association of Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They are all here to represent—

Interjection: Everyone's here today, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's the first time I've ever heard of a filibuster during introductions.

The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm pleased to welcome a couple of people from the Canadian Cancer Society who are from my riding: Kalasian Kalaichelvan and Linda Wu. Welcome to Queen's Park. I hope you enjoy your day here.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to welcome Mr. Erdeniz Şen, consul general of Turkey. He is visiting us with members from the community: Dr. Mehmet Bor, president of the Federation of Canadian Turkish Associations; Mr. Celal Uçar, president of the Turkish Culture and Folklore Society of Canada; Mrs. Yildiz Ünsal, treasurer of the Turkish Federation Community Foundation; Mr. Ismail Vataner, past president of the Turkic Assembly of Canada; Mr. Nazif Kurt, vice-president of the Turkish Culture and Folklore Society of Canada; and Mrs. Nuriye Astalos, the director of the Federation of Canadian Turkish Associations. They are in the House today on the occasion of the multicultural children's day festival proclamation. There's a reception at Queen's Park today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Another filibuster.

The member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today Councillor Doug Measures, Councillor Kevin Elwood and Mr. Chuck Magwood. They're all here for the wind turbine debate this afternoon. I also welcome Ian Adams from Metroland Media Group, located in my riding.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to welcome to the Legislature Mr. Paul Elliott, president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. Welcome, Paul.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Page Harry Blackwell has some people here for us to meet today: his dad, Geoff Blackwell; his brother, Jack Blackwell; and his grandmother, Joan Blackwell. Please give them a warm Queen's Park welcome.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We have three North Bay guests from the Canadian Cancer Society: Mr. Gil Pharand, Katelyn Haddow and "The Debster."

Mr. Chris Ballard: I'm delighted to introduce four people today. Bonnie Kraft is the president of the Aurora Cultural Centre, Laura Schembri is the executive director of the Aurora Cultural Centre, and David Schembri is Laura's partner. Also in the House, Mr. Speaker, is

Janice Hodgson. Janice is the regional representative for south-central Ontario and represents the region as a member of the Canadian Cancer Society's Ontario board of directors.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome three members from the Canadian Cancer Society, Hastings-Prince Edward and Brighton branch: Karen White, Amy Doyle and Jeff Brace.

Also, I had the pleasure of having breakfast with Jan Hopkins from Carleton Place, who is with us this morning, and Lucas Rodrigues, one of the youth advocates from Ajax. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to introduce five people from the Canadian Cancer Society in eastern Ontario who are here with us today: Laura Lafantaisie, Terri McNamara, Byron James, Roger Martin and Theresa Crossan.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to extend a warm welcome to Doug Kane, the manager of the Canadian Cancer Society Frontenac Lennox and Addington and the Waterways community office.

I would also like to wish a big hoş geldiniz to our friends from the Turkish community: Mr. Erdeniz Şen, Dr. Mehmet Bor, Mrs. Yildiz Ünsal, Mr. Ismail Vataner and Mrs. Nuriye Astalos. Hoş geldiniz.

Hon. David Zimmer: On behalf of Brad Duguid, Scarborough Centre, I would like to acknowledge the page captain from his riding, Diluk Ramachandra; his mother, Ruwani Ramachandra; and his father, Tiddy Ramachandra.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I'm very happy to see two very good friends from Ottawa visiting the chamber today: Senator and Mrs. Ngo. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I am delighted to welcome to Queen's Park today four representatives from Kitchener Centre and surrounding areas who are here with the Canadian Cancer Society. They are Diane Hawrylenko, Karen Griffiths, Nicole Amorim and Sara Orrell. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I would also like to welcome Karen White and Jeff Brace, from the wonderful riding of Northumberland–Quinte West, here on behalf of cancer.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to welcome grade 10 students from Dr. Norman Bethune, along with their teacher, Alison Rimell. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

Seeing none, the member from Ottawa South on a point of order.

WEARING OF PINS

Mr. John Fraser: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe that you will find we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear daffodils in recognition of cancer awareness month.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Ottawa South is seeking unanimous consent to wear daf-

fodils for this month. Do we agree? Agreed. To the people who are wearing them, it's now legitimate.

The Minister of Labour on a point of order.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, I think you will find we have unanimous consent that all members of the House be permitted to wear pins in recognition of the National Day of Mourning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Labour is seeking unanimous consent to wear pins for the National Day of Mourning. Do we agree? Agreed.

The member from York-Simcoe on a point of order.

WEARING OF SCARVES

Mrs. Julia Munro: Mr. Speaker, I would like to request unanimous consent to wear the red-and-yellow freedom scarves in the House today. It is to mark the Journey to Freedom Day next Saturday, April 30, to celebrate the journey to freedom of Vietnamese Ontarians, as well as to reflect on the many contributions that they continue to make to Ontario.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from York-Simcoe is seeking unanimous consent to wear the scarves. Do we agree? Agreed.

Just before we do that, I'm going to ask that the front benches not hang them over, because it is not considered to be appropriate, and a reminder that you should get unanimous consent to wear anything other than what you're normally allowed to. It's a reminder for some people who have been putting these things on beforehand. I appreciate your co-operation in that.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. On May 1, hydro rates will rise again and life will get even harder under the Liberals, despite the Minister of Finance trying to convince everyone that hydro prices are going down. I'm still shaking my head about that. Why would everyone pay more for their hydro bills because Ontario families use less energy? Only in the Liberal government's Ontario. I actually thought it was a joke the first time I heard it.

Does the Premier think it's okay for families and seniors to pay more when they are using less?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Individually, those people would pay less who use less. The Leader of the Opposition knows that the Ontario Energy Board is an independent regulator with a mandate to protect the interests of Ontario ratepayers—

Interjections.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Kick them all out.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not helpful, Minister. But I am going to say that I will not tolerate outbursts like yesterday.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Energy conservation is proven to be successful and provides savings for consumers on every bill. The time-of-use pricing offers opportunities for savings. I would also say to the member opposite that the programs that we have put in place to help low-income seniors and other residents of the province are designed exactly to help those people that I hope the Leader of the Opposition is talking about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: A letter to the editor in the North Bay Nugget hit the nail on the head. There are some smart folks in North Bay. Murray Byers wrote to the paper and he said that he thought the goal was to reduce electricity use. Yet, he continued—and this is his letter to editor—"when electricity consumption actually declines, the knee-jerk reaction ... is to increase rates."

Just yesterday, the Premier announced \$43 million in funding for energy retrofits to improve energy efficiency. Yet under the Liberal government, that means higher energy prices for everyone.

Can the Premier explain? Are the people of Ontario supposed to conserve energy or are they supposed to use more energy so their hydro rates don't go up? You've created an impossible situation.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said before, individual consumers who conserve pay less on their energy bills.

The investments that have been made in the electricity system to make sure that we have a reliable electricity system—a clean grid—are investments that were needed because of years of neglect in the electricity system. We've been rebuilding this system. When we came into office in 2003, there were brownouts and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Next time I stand, I may have to move immediately into warnings, and if that's what's requested, it will happen.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like the member from Simcoe-Grey to come to order, at least when I'm standing.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member who was muttering under his breath might want to explain why there had not been investment in transmission lines and why there had not been an upgrading of the grid for the whole time that he was in office.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier. Hydro bills can be summed up like this in Ontario: You use too much energy, you pay more; you conserve energy, you pay more. No matter what, under this Liberal government, you pay more. They try to muddy the waters; they try to confuse the issue. The reality is, they have messed up hydro prices in Ontario, they have messed up the energy sector, and they are responsible for it.

No matter what, because of this Liberal government, you pay more for electricity and life gets harder. They've already overcharged Ontario, according to the AG, by \$37 billion, and we lost almost \$3.5 billion in energy over the last two years because of overproduction. If Ontarians unplug their TVs, turn off their lights and keep the AC off, they still pay more.

How much longer does the Premier expect the people of Ontario to subsidize power for other provinces and other states? It's ridiculous.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We've taken strong action to mitigate the costs of energy for families and businesses and to introduce new programs to lower costs. The Ontario Electricity Support Program, which supports low-income families, has benefited almost 80,000 households in Ontario.

We shut down the coal plants. We've invested in the electricity system in this province. We don't have smog days. It's a clean grid. This party opposite is filibustering the climate change bill in committee, because, actually, they don't believe in clean energy. They don't believe in reducing greenhouse gas emissions—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. It's coming from both sides.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: They actually have no commitment to making sure that we maintain a clean electricity grid. We don't know if they would reopen coal plants, but what we do know is that they're not interested in climate change action. They're not interested in it today, and they weren't interested in it when they were in office.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: The only strong action this government is taking is subsidizing hydro rates in Manitoba, Quebec, New York and Michigan. The only filibuster that is happening is by the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Climate Change, who had to amend his own bill 70 times because he bungled the drafting of his own bill.

Let me read to you another note, this one from Matt Barbeau from Sault Ste. Marie. He wrote on our Facebook page. He has a cottage that is unoccupied in winter months and uses no power, but it costs him more than his home in town that he lives in year-round.

I know the government wants to laugh about this. They're insensitive to the bills that people are struggling to pay. But the reality is, this is happening everywhere.

So my question is, why are you putting hard-working Ontarians in this position? Why can't you get the hydro sector right?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am extremely sensitive to the needs of the people in this province for a clean, predictable electricity system—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: And reliable.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that is reliable, that allows people and businesses to count on that electricity grid.

I'm also very sensitive to the fact that there are low-income and low-middle-income families in this province who need support, which is exactly why the Ontario Energy Support Program has been put in place, which is exactly why the northern industrial energy rate is put in place and which is exactly why there are electricity and property tax credits put in place for seniors. Those programs are all designed to help people to be able to deal with energy costs.

But I'm also sympathetic to kids with asthma who need clean air. That's why we shut down the coal plants, that's why we've made the investments, and that's why we have a clean grid in this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: The Premier said that they're delivering predictable—"predictable" is the word she used—hydro prices. When you give away \$3.5 billion of power in two years, the only predictable prices you're getting are in Manitoba, Quebec, New York and Michigan, because of your government.

How about Ontario? How about we start helping individuals in Ontario?

1050

Joanne MacDonald Schroeder wrote us a note, and she said she has two properties up north, one on a vacant lot that has no power at all. The one lot did, however, have a hydro pole. They got a bill—no hydro, but they got a bill for a \$179 delivery fee.

My question for the Premier is: Are these bills that you're sending out, these charges to hard-working Ontarians—is that to pay for the \$4-million salary you just gave Ontario's hydro CEO, the highest salary in Canada for a hydro CEO?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I will just say to the member opposite that we have worked very, very hard to upgrade the electricity system in this province that needed to be upgraded, that was not reliable. It certainly wasn't a clean grid, and it had been neglected. Over 10,000 kilometres of line have been built because that had not been done under the previous government.

There was a cost associated with moving off of coal. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to move back to coal, he'd better be clear about that with the people of the

province. This afternoon, one of his members is going to be talking about the evils of wind power. One of his members is going to talk about how she doesn't believe—

Mr. Todd Smith: On a runway.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And if the member chooses to speak again as soon as I ask him to stop, then I'll give him a warning.

A wrap-up sentence, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: She's going to talk about how she doesn't believe in clean renewable power, and her colleagues are filibustering at committee on a climate change bill because they don't believe in that either.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Sarnia–Lambton will come to order.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, the drive-by smears in Whitby–Oshawa on coal didn't work, and they're not going to work right now. We need to address the facts. The fact is, hydro bills are going up beyond belief.

Abe Eberly wrote me a note to say that his hydro bill was \$98 a month in the summer, two years ago, and now they are paying \$220 a month. This is in less than three years. He can't afford it. It's not right.

Although the Minister of Finance says hydro bills are going down, I want to ask the Premier directly: Do you believe in the Minister of Finance's fantasy world where hydro bills are going down across Ontario, or do you recognize the fact that bills are going up, through the roof, because of your government's incompetence?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. I—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It doesn't really matter where you sit in the House.

Just a reminder: To the Chair, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, this Leader of the Opposition, who is out of step with the 150 countries that are in New York today reaffirming their commitment to climate change reduction—this leader, whose members are going to fight renewable energy tooth and nail, can stay on that path if that is his choice.

What the Minister of Finance said is that we have a long-term energy plan and that the rates are not increasing at the speed that we had laid out because we are applying downward pressure to those electricity rates. We have competitive rates, if you look at our neighbouring jurisdictions.

We are going to continue to make the investments in our electricity system—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that will keep it clean, that will keep it renewable. We are going to continue to fight climate change—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Just not affordable.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I don't mind the exercise, but if you make me get up right after I sit down, then I'll do it. The member from Nipissing, come to order.

You have one sentence, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We are going to fight climate change.

As the Deputy Premier said, what price does the Leader of the Opposition put on asthma?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, may I start by asking MPPs in the chamber, and others, to thank and congratulate the legislative library staff on 30 years of fantastic service with our press clippings, Toronto Press Today?

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The leaders of three of Ontario's largest political parties, together with Democracy Watch and newspaper editorial boards, are all calling for an inclusive, non-partisan process for reforming party and election financing laws in our province. Does this Premier believe that the Green Party, Democracy Watch and the editorial boards are all trying to stall meaningful reform?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have put forward a process that is the definition of democratic because it is the way this Legislature operates. This is a democratically elected Legislature. There is a process in place whereby legislation is introduced, is consulted upon. We've expanded that process by proposing that we send the legislation after it's introduced to consultation after first reading.

My hope was that the House leaders were going to be able to agree on how there might be input from the opposition parties before the legislation was drafted. I still hope that may happen. I look forward to the consultation, where we will get commentary on many of the things where there is consensus, in terms of the banning of union and corporate donations. But we'll get refinement on those because I know that there are opinions around the province, and we look forward to hearing those.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier wants to have new election rules in place by January 2017, and I don't disagree. In fact, I told her that directly. Ontario can have, however, a non-partisan panel that includes political parties and civil society recommend those new rules, and we can have legislation based on those recommendations, drafted and passed, well in advance of January 2017's deadline. It is a timely process, but more importantly—most importantly—it is a process that is credible and will be respected by Ontarians.

Will this Premier abandon her efforts to control this process in favour of the Liberal Party of Ontario and agree to start the ball rolling today on a non-partisan, open and transparent process that the people of Ontario are now demanding?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the leader of the third party wants to continue to talk about process. I understand that. She wants to go through a process and then, after that, introduce legislation and then, after that, have another consultation, which will drag out the process. I understand that for her own political reasons, she wants to continue to have that conversation.

What we want to do is get going. We want to get the legislation drafted. I would love to have input from the opposition leaders. I would love to have input before the legislation is drafted, and then we can send the legislation out for consultation—because there are a lot of questions associated with what should be in that legislation. I would love to hear from the leader of the third party, for example, whether she thinks, as I've proposed, that we should introduce leadership and nomination campaign spending limits and donation rules. I'd love to know if she thinks we should reform by-election rules and what we should do in terms of by-elections that may be coming up sooner rather than later. I haven't heard from her on those things.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I would love to know if this Premier actually believes in the tenets of an open democracy. That's what I would love to know, because it certainly doesn't look that way.

It is disappointing in the extreme that this Premier continues to hold this untenable position around election finance reform. The Liberal Party actually used to believe that it was anti-democratic for one party and one Premier to unilaterally change election laws. A lot changes after 12 years in power, apparently, because now this Premier is doing her best to discredit anyone who questions her unilateral plan to change Ontario's election rules to favour the Liberal—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please, leader?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —to favour the Liberal Party of Ontario.

As one newspaper editorial wrote, changes will be “best delivered through consultation and co-operation, not bulldozing.” That's exactly what I'm calling for, what the Conservatives are calling for, what the Green Party is calling for, what Democracy Watch is calling for.

When will the Premier stop trying to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What is kind of interesting in here is that the third party seems to think that they are immune to the issue of fundraising. I strongly disagree with that. In fact, let's just review some of the very

special events that have been hosted by the leader of the third party.

There was one at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts—I bet it was wonderful—limited to 10 guests, \$9,975 per person. But you know what? If you couldn't make it to that one, there was a private stakeholder social at the Gardiner Museum—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Tonight.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: No, it was actually a year ago. It was—

Mr. Paul Miller: There's one time it was—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek can do a walk-by heckling all he wants; I'm still going to call him on it.

Answer, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Ten lucky guests paid a bargain basement \$9,975 to attend. I'm sure it was lovely—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Courts have ruled that the Liberal government violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms with Bill 115. Will this Premier take this opportunity to apologize to parents, students and education workers for trampling on collective bargaining rights and throwing our schools into chaos?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The decision is being reviewed, obviously. It has just come down.

When I ran for leadership in 2012-13, I was very clear that I had problems with Bill 115. Bill 115 has been repealed. We have established a new bargaining process. We are working with the education sector. I believe that the move away from Bill 115 was exactly the right thing to do.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: When the Liberal government introduced Bill 115, this Premier said that “everyone did what they thought they needed to do.” Actually, everyone, from teachers to the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, including New Democrats, knew that Bill 115 was unconstitutional.

Now can this Premier explain to families thrown into chaos in 2012 why she was part of a cabinet that chose to put political grandstanding and the political interests of her political party ahead of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the rights of people to free collective bargaining in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, I will say again that I was very clear when I ran to be the leader of this party—I was very clear—that I was not happy with Bill 115. I was not happy with the relationship with the education sector. My career has been built on partnerships within the education sector, on the management and the employee side. I will stand up any day for the education sector, and that is how I got to this place. That's how I will continue.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Some things never change when it comes to Liberal self-interest, particularly in terms of their timing. Yesterday, the court ordered the province to discuss the remedies for violating the charter with Bill 115. The Liberals were warned in 2012 that Bill 115 would end up costing our province, and it has in many ways. The only reason that Ontarians will be on the hook for paying remedies is because the Liberal government thought that trampling on teachers' bargaining rights would help them win a by-election in Kitchener-Waterloo.

How much is this Liberal government's self-serving decision going to cost the people of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, the decision is being reviewed.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Did you vote for Bill 115?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The heckling from the other side is, "Did I vote for Bill 115?" I was a member of a cabinet and I was working to the very best of my ability to do what—

Mr. John Yakabuski: So you sold out your principles to stay in cabinet? Wow.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, second time.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the reality—
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Wrap up, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The point I'm making is that at the first opportunity, when I ran in the leadership, I made it very clear that we were going to make changes if I was elected leader. We've made those changes, and I will continue to work with the education sector to the very best of my ability.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mrs. Gila Martow: To the Premier: Last Friday, the Premier met Cliff McIntosh from my riding of Thornhill at the autism rally held at her constituency office. I'm sure the Premier will agree that Cliff very clearly and ably communicated the progress he made as a result of starting IBI therapy over the age of five.

Does the Premier agree Cliff clearly communicated the benefits of IBI beyond the age of five?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I was very happy to meet Cliff. There were a couple of other people at my office, and I was happy to have an opportunity to talk with them and to make it clear that I'd be happy to talk with them again. I think Laura was one of them. I'm happy to have a further conversation with her.

I also made it clear that what we are doing is making sure that as children come off of wait-lists, where they are not getting service, we will move them into service that has the intensity that is right for them, to a program

that is tailor-made for them, and that there is a transition plan as they come off the waiting list.

I think some of the fear-mongering that has gone on is that somehow, they're coming off a waiting list and there is nothing that will happen. That's not the reality. The reality is that as these children who are not getting service come off the waiting list into a transition, they are getting service as part of that transition. To my mind, that is much more important than languishing on a waiting list and getting no service whatsoever.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Dufferin-Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Back to the Premier: Cliff is still waiting for your call. You promised that you would have a further conversation and that hasn't happened.

The Premier spoke to Cliff. She saw how well Cliff articulated the benefits he received from IBI therapy after the age of five.

According to your own ministry documents, 85% of the kids currently receiving IBI therapy are over the age of five—85% of children who will now be removed from this critical therapy simply because they've had a birthday. Families are being told their children are being removed from IBI therapy May 1—removal; no transition plan. Your transition plan is to transition kids onto another waiting list.

Premier, it's never too late to do the right thing. Announce today you are reversing your decision and allow kids over five, kids like Cliff, to access IBI therapy.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I think it's important to recognize that children who are receiving IBI services today are not being removed from service. They are being assessed by clinical experts at their next—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Take a look at the Speaker.

Minister?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. This is a very important point: that children who are getting IBI will be assessed at their next scheduled clinical assessment. A transition plan will be developed. If they need more intensive services, they're going to get that service. We will make sure that the plans are very flexible and individual, based on that child's needs. That's the intention of the new program—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Good morning, Speaker. My question this morning is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Good morning, Minister.

Last week, the government quietly sent around a proposal that stripped tenants of some of their rights. The proposal was sent to just four stakeholder groups and not released to the public. The groups were given just one week to provide feedback. The document basically blamed tenants for the lack of affordable housing in Ontario. The solution, according to the government, is to give landlords more powers to evict people.

1110

Speaker, can the government provide one shred of evidence or any peer-reviewed study, other than the anecdotes of a few landlords, showing that more evictions could create new affordable housing units in Ontario?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Well, Minister—good morning, member from Windsor—Tecumseh—

Hon. Liz Sandals: Member.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Member. I always appreciate the member's questions, because they're usually substantive and thoughtfully put, and I appreciate that.

In a perfect world, we'd have—

Mr. Randy Hillier: You'd have no Liberals.

Laughter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As sharp as that is, the member from Lanark will come to order.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I remind the member that we're still on this side of the House.

In a perfect world, we'd have perfect landlords and we'd have perfect tenants, and we'd have no need at all for a Landlord and Tenant Board, because everything would be fine. But until we live in that perfect world, we need the Landlord and Tenant Board and the protections that it affords. We're proud of the protections we've provided for both landlords and tenants in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: There could be many reasons why people aren't creating more affordable secondary suites to rent to tenants. Restrictive zoning bylaws and high property taxes come to mind. But the government says, "No, the real problem is tenants. The solution is more evictions."

By the way, Speaker, it just so happens that the third-biggest campaign donor in Ontario is a lobby group representing—wait for it, wait for it—landlords. Why is the minister basing his affordable housing policy on the anecdotes of Liberal campaign donors and not on facts and objective analysis?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: There are a number of potential remedies that can help us to increase and enhance the availability of social and affordable housing. There have been some advocates on the other side, and we've embraced their advocacy around inclusive zoning, secondary units and what have you.

The comments and reflections in the consultation paper are not our proposals. They're things we've heard from the sectors. The fact that we sent it out to four groups: It was a pre-consultation release sent to four groups that we knew would have an interest who might

help us to shape the consultation papers. That's a standard process when you're doing government policy.

We're going to be moving ahead. We're going to be looking at potential changes to the Landlord and Tenant Board and better remedies that will make processes more fair, introduce new protections for both tenants and landlords, and make it easier for small landlords to stay in the game.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: My question this morning is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Our government is continuously working to support the mining industry in northern Ontario. I understand that our government recently announced a renewed Mineral Development Strategy that will provide a blueprint for how we will build on our industry's well-earned global reputation.

As the minister knows, the mining landscape is constantly evolving, and you can just look in my riding of Sudbury, with great mining companies that are continuing to evolve. Recognizing this changing landscape and the importance of the mineral sector to Ontario's future is a key part of the Mineral Development Strategy.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please update this House on what this government is doing to enhance our ongoing support for the mining industry in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to thank the member from Sudbury for the question.

He's absolutely right: The mineral industry is so critical for Ontario, particularly for communities in northern Ontario. Ontario accounts for over 25% of mining jobs in Canada—26,000 directly; 50,000 indirectly—and the mineral sector is also the largest private sector employer of aboriginal peoples in Canada. In addition, Ontario is also the leading jurisdiction for the exploration and the production of minerals in Canada and remains a major player around the world.

We are committed to attracting new investment and supporting innovation in the mineral exploration and development sector. In fact, Mr. Speaker, just recently we announced that the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. will be investing \$5 million in the Junior Exploration Assistance Program, which will help exploration and certainly will be part of our renewed mineral development strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this government is committed to developing the mineral exploration industry in Ontario. The mining industry is critical to communities like my own, as it helps support more than 26,000 direct and 50,000 indirect jobs.

Funding a program to assist junior exploration will provide financial assistance to qualified individuals carrying out exploration activities. Minister, I understand that recently the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. awarded the Ontario Prospectors Association \$5 million

in funding to create an incentive program called the Junior Exploration Assistance Program, or JEAP. Mr. Speaker, can the minister please tell us more about the Junior Exploration Assistance Program and the significance of this very important investment?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: This is really a great program. We recognize the challenges in this sector, particularly the junior exploration sector, and we want to be able to provide much-needed financial support to see more of those projects come forward.

Building on the core expertise of the Ontario Prospectors Association, the Junior Exploration Assistance Program, or JEAP, and the funds associated with it will be administered directly by the OPA, the prospectors' association, to junior exploration companies across the north. The \$5-million investment to this program, we believe, can support more than 45 exploration projects. This will clearly help promote long-term competitiveness and continue to attract jobs and investment. We are excited about this program, Mr. Speaker. It will help support a healthy, competitive and sustainable mineral sector, another part of our plan to build Ontario up.

POLICE OVERSIGHT

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Attorney General. It was disturbing to hear that, for over a month, a significant SIU report sat gathering dust in your office. The report was an investigation into the fatal shooting of an individual here in Toronto. The SIU investigators did their job, the SIU director did his job, yet the Attorney General could not be bothered to do hers.

To have the chief law officer of this province ignore this report for so long is tantamount to wilfully frustrating justice. It clearly demonstrates confused priorities, a lack of compassion and an absence of sympathy, and erodes the public's confidence in her office.

Speaker, why did the Attorney General not read the report herself the moment she received it and demonstrate the utmost respect not only of her office, but, more importantly, to a grieving family?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to assure the House that I was very well briefed—twice—on this report and that I've read the report.

Mr. Speaker, public confidence in the transparency of police oversight is a priority for our government. We recognize that there are concerns about the current process. We have a responsibility to ensure—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader, second time.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: —that the public interest is being served. That's why we have committed to a public consultation. It is our objective that the review and public consultation would guide, among other things, when and how best to release the report. We will be appointing a reviewer as soon as possible; we have announced that. My ministry will begin consultations on police oversight in the coming weeks.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the Attorney General: My question was about why she didn't do it. This is not just another government report full of numbers and figures. It's an investigation into why someone died. A father, a husband, a son, a person was killed. It is deserving of immediacy, not briefs.

1120

The Attorney General's lack of action and compassion has brought clouds of doubt over her office, embarrassed her colleagues in law enforcement and exposed her inability to fulfill her duties.

Were there just too many ribbons to cut, fundraisers to attend or cheques to cash? Can the Attorney General explain to this House what was so important that it took priority over this investigation and justified her turning her back not just on the family of Mr. Loku but on all of Ontario?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I have heard the concerns in the community. I have heard the concerns from everyone, from all our stakeholders, that the process needs to be reviewed. I heard it from the SIU. I heard it from the police officers. I heard it from the community, from Black Lives Matter—I've heard it.

That's why we will initiate this consultation to find when and how best to release the report. It's important that people feel good and are reassured about what is in the report that they cannot see. That's the question that is being asked. We wanted to answer the concerns of the public. The consultation will help us to find when and how best to release the report.

CANCER TREATMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. Today, members of the Canadian Cancer Society, cancer survivors and their families are with us at Queen's Park. They can tell you that no one fighting cancer should have to fight for drug coverage as well.

Yet in Ontario today, the costs of cancer drugs taken in hospitals are publicly covered; the costs of cancer drugs taken at home are not. Patients are forced to pay out of pocket for their life-saving medication or fight for reimbursement through personal insurance or Trillium. The problem has gotten so bad, Speaker, that one in six cancer patients in this province say that their out-of-pocket drug costs are significant or even unmanageable.

Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia all do the right thing: They cover the cost of cancer drugs taken at home. Ontario should do the same. Will the Premier do the right thing and extend full public coverage for cancer drugs taken at home?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question and welcome the many members from the Canadian Cancer Society who are joining us here today. They know and we all, I think, recognize that Ontario is a leader in

cancer care, not just in Canada but around the world. We have one of the best chances of survival of anywhere in the world, Mr. Speaker, and we cover more than 3,800 drugs to fight cancer.

We have added to that new drug funding amounting to more than \$1.5 billion in the last decade. We have in fact tripled the amount of money that we invest in cancer-fighting drugs. We have added 57 new cancer drugs to our formulary in the last decade, and 33 oral treatments as well, in reference to the question of the member opposite.

We know that there's more work to be done. CCO, Cancer Care Ontario, is working on this together with my ministry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, it has been a year and a half since Cancer Care Ontario released a report that called for equitable access to cancer drugs, regardless of whether they were administered in the hospital or at home. The ministers have had this report for a year and a half. This report says, "Public drug coverage for take-home cancer medications should align with the funding model for hospital-administered drugs...." It's simple as that, Speaker.

Cancer patients have been waiting for a year and a half for this Liberal government to act. They are tired of waiting. They are frustrated. They cannot afford to keep paying out of pocket for drugs they need to literally save their lives. Will the Premier and the minister stop stalling, stop delaying and provide full public coverage for at-home cancer drugs?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As a government and as a ministry, we do everything we can to provide the highest quality of care, including for cancer patients around this province. I know that there's more work to be done. We're well aware of the Cancer Care Ontario work that they have done and that is ongoing. My ministry is working with them as well. We've made available, either through the Ontario drug program or through Trillium, for example, opportunities for individuals who are challenged.

I know the member opposite knows that we have a great cancer system. She herself said just a couple of years ago that she marvelled as to where we are at in Ontario with cancer services. We're one of the best in the world, and I think that part of this is because of the fantastic work that CCO does every day. I agree with her on that. I think Cancer Care Ontario does an exceptional job. They've provided us with important advice.

As I mentioned, almost 4,000 drugs are being provided, including for cancer patients. There is more work to be done, and we're prepared to do that work.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. My constituents in Barrie are very excited to see our government reinstating the Connecting Links program as part of budget 2015. For some time,

municipalities told us that making Connecting Links projects eligible under other infrastructure projects was not sufficient. That is why we now provide small, rural and northern municipalities with expanded access to predictable, stable and annual funding. While the opposition refused to support the reinstatement of this fund in 2015, Ontario municipalities, including Barrie, have continued to praise our government for delivering on this file.

Can the minister please tell the members of this House more about the new and improved Connecting Links program?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the outstanding member for Barrie for being an extraordinary representative for that important community.

Last year, this government was extremely excited to announce the reinstatement of a stand-alone Connecting Links program as part of our budget 2015. I was very pleased recently to be in Barrie, alongside the local member and Premier Kathleen Wynne, to highlight some enhancements that are being made to this important program. This government is now committing \$20 million to municipalities through this program in 2016-17 with funding increasing to \$30 million per year by 2018-19.

This is just one more important way that we are showing our long-term commitment to Ontario's rural and northern communities and the families who live there, something that the opposition clearly does not support as they voted against this funding in budget 2016. While the opposition has chosen to vote against providing municipalities with more infrastructure funding, we'll continue to take decisive action to build Ontario up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I want to thank the minister for his response. I, like many people living in my riding, was thrilled to hear that our community will be receiving funding through this new program. There are 352 Connecting Links in 77 municipalities across the province. Many members of this House have Connecting Links in their ridings.

Because demand for the program was so high this year, I understand there have been some concerns expressed by municipalities that did not receive funding in the first intake. These municipalities have questions about the process that was used to select this year's recipients. Can the minister please tell members of the House more about the application process used for the new Connecting Links program?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I appreciate the member's follow-up question. Applications officially opened in November, and we were pleased to receive a total of 60 applications from right across the province of Ontario. Ministry staff evaluated funding applications based on technical need and safety issues. In our first intake, we were able to fund 23 projects. These projects included those coming from across the province, whether in Barrie, Smith's Falls or in the riding of Peterborough and Havelock.

In many regions, the highest priority projects typically involved bridges or pavement in very poor condition.

MTO staff will continue to be available to municipalities in order to provide advice as needed.

We would encourage all municipalities that can qualify for funding from Connecting Links to apply for the next intake of this program, expected to be announced later this year.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Whenever I tell the minister his government is putting pilot safety at risk by allowing the wind turbine project near the Collingwood Regional Airport, I get the answer that Transport Canada and Nav Canada aren't concerned, so all is well.

1130

However, Collingwood airport is a registered aerodrome and not a Transport Canada-certified airport. Therefore, its operational airspace is not protected by Transport Canada. That means Transport Canada will not interfere with the province's decision to approve the placement of wind turbines within the operational airspace of the airport. Hence, flight risks—namely the 500-foot-tall wind turbines the Liberals want to put next to the airport—have not been reviewed or assessed by Transport Canada or Nav Canada, as they have no authority to act.

Will the minister finally admit this government is putting pilot safety at risk by allowing this wind turbine project to proceed?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: First of all, the member opposite—and I appreciate his concern—is a former Minister of the Environment, so I know he's very familiar with how these decisions are made. The first is, these are not decisions made by the minister. I do not have any say at all. My job is to protect these decisions by the director from becoming political. This is a director's decision made on technical evidence.

The director consulted several times with Nav Canada and Transport Canada. I have in front of me her notes, three pages from about half a dozen meetings. At each and every time, Nav Canada and Transport Canada—who are the experts, unlike myself and the member opposite—said there were not safety issues here that were at all material. Surely, he doesn't want—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I think the minister should be ashamed of how dismissive he is of not only the concerns of the people in my riding of Simcoe-Grey, but pilots across Canada and North America. This is a very busy regional airport, with 11,000 takeoffs and landings a year.

The fact that, up until this point, you have been hiding behind Nav Canada and Transport Canada—I'm glad to see you didn't do it today, because you know you've been wrong all the way along. It's a regional airport, not a certified airport.

I have no doubt that your director is following the law, but it's your guys who changed the law and took away the

planning authority from local municipalities so that they could direct where these projects should go. No local municipality would ever put 500-foot-tall—50-storeys-tall—wind turbines within 2.1 nautical miles of the end of a runway. That's about four seconds after you take off.

Government planes go in there. When you're in a government plane and you have to go into that airport, especially when it's snowy or foggy or rainy—we're just off Georgian Bay.

Change the law. Cancel this project. Will you do that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This is kind of passing strange. I didn't know the member opposite was an expert in aviation or in environmental law. The difference—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Norm, what do you have to say? You're a pilot.

Mr. Norm Miller: He's going to kill people. That's what I have to say.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I actually asked the ministry. They reviewed this, as did the director, and found several cases where there are many aerodromes and airports in which there are similar structures in similar proximity to the airport. I have an airport in my constituency where the planes fly past very tall buildings and smokestacks that are much closer than anything in this case.

The proposition of the member opposite is that we should not follow due process. The director's decision can be appealed to the ERT, of which six people are. Another expert body—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. High-pressure door-to-door sales of hot water heaters and air conditioners is a problem in many communities across the province, including my community in Hamilton. Often, it is the most vulnerable, elderly and infirm residents who are the victims of these tactics. They're pressured to sign on to high-interest leases that end up costing them tens of thousands of dollars in interest that they have no hope to ever repay. There are countless stories of these tactics being used by companies like the Ontario Energy Group.

The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services has known about these tactics of this company for years now—since 2009—but only last week was it announced that the company is facing charges, and only in Newmarket.

My question is: What took so long to lay these charges and why is the scope of the investigation limited to just one area of the province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. David Oraziotti: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. We take these issues very seriously with respect to consumer door-to-door sales. It's one of the reasons why we passed Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, which in fact expanded the length of time in which a consumer has the right to get out of a contract. In Ontario, for any contract, there's a 10-day standing rule where an individual can, for any reason whatsoever, decide that they don't want to be in that contract. They have that ability.

We also have an enforcement division in the ministry. They have been investigating on an ongoing basis. There were 142 charges laid with respect to a particular company. That matter is, obviously, going before the court.

We take action where it is appropriate to do so, and we're standing up for consumers on a daily basis in our ministry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, one of my constituents, a widow on a fixed income, received a notice that her home has a lien on it from this particular company. Her option? Pay high monthly payments for a hot water heater that she didn't need, or pay up to thousands of dollars to break a contract she never signed.

What does the Premier have to say to this widow in my community who has a pay-up-or-lose-your-house notice from this company and doesn't have time to wait for the government to get around to looking at this company's actions in Hamilton?

Hon. David Oraziotti: Speaker, very clearly we are very concerned about any individual who may be misled at the door about their particular contract. They have the ability to get out of their contract.

We know, in section 14 of the legislation, that if an individual has a disability, if they don't understand the contract or if there's a language barrier, they in fact have up to a year to get out of that contract.

If there's a particular individual who has not contacted our ministry, I'd be happy to take that information and I'd be happy to be aware of that information.

The ministry will act; absolutely, Speaker. We are concerned about these issues. We continue to strengthen this legislation to protect consumers in Ontario, and I encourage those individuals to bring those concerns to our ministry.

RETIREMENT HOMES

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Ma question est pour le ministre responsable des affaires des aînés, Signor il Ministro Mario Sergio. Speaker, as you'll know, seniors are living longer and the number of seniors is growing rapidly. This is particularly true in my own riding of Etobicoke North. As you may appreciate, in the last century one of the triumphs of medical science and public health is that life expectancy has almost doubled, from 40 to 85.

But of course, seniors' years can be a time of a second childhood, of frailty and compromise of activities of

daily living. So seniors are often confronted with a decision tree where they have to think about downsizing and giving up the comfort of their own home where they may have lived for many years and even raised their family.

Seniors have many decisions to make. For example, they may ask: What should they do? Where should they go? What type of housing may suffice and how much will this cost?

Speaker, can the minister please inform this House about the benefits of a retirement home and what these have to offer our seniors?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Merci à mon collègue pour la question, the very dynamic member from Etobicoke North.

Retirement homes are communities designed for seniors who want to live a somewhat independent lifestyle and have the choice of support for their daily living.

Residents should feel safe and comfortable in an environment that reflects their own home and not a facility.

They may provide services such as meal preparation, bathing assistance, administering medicine, the service of a health care professional and much more.

Seniors choose retirement homes for freedom from maintaining a home, enjoying privacy while knowing someone is aware of their well-being, belonging to a community of peers and participating in social activities and having peace of mind, knowing that they are living in a safe and secure environment.

Seniors expect safety and the comfort of a home without the worry or work.

1140

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Mille grazie, Ministro Sergio, per la risposta.

One of the major apprehensions seniors have when they consider moving into retirement homes is the quality, the standards of living, its upkeep and facilities. Seniors often raise questions in my own riding of Etobicoke North about the level of services, care and safety; for example, what resources do they have when they face problems while living in a retirement home? Who's responsible for monitoring the units to ensure they are in good condition? And who's responsible for upkeep and maintenance? Finally, when a problem arises in a retirement home, what resources are available?

Can the minister please inform this chamber how Ontario seniors in a regulated retirement home can seek redress when problems arise?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Speaker, again, merci to the remarkable member from Etobicoke North.

We have, in Ontario, some 750 retirement homes with about 50,000 residents. Seniors living in retirement homes have very strong protection under the Retirement Homes Act, legislation first introduced by this House back in 2010. The act also created the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority, which educates and inspects retirement homes to ensure they meet the standards that are required.

As of July 2012, a retirement home that wants to operate has to obtain a licence and comply with the requirements of the act, including protecting seniors from abuse and neglect; mandatory standards of care; mandatory safety plans, including emergency and fire plans; mandatory staff training; and posting very prominently the seniors' bill of rights.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Jim McDonell: To the Minister of Government and Consumer Services: You gave direction to public servants to appoint a practising real estate professional from Sault Ste. Marie to the Real Estate Council of Ontario. You did so despite knowing that your three appointees to the board must come from outside the profession to ensure consumer voices and interests are fairly represented. By doing so, you overruled the Public Employments Secretariat and your own mandate.

It's disturbing and sad that your reaction to getting caught in another patronage appointment was to throw your ministry staff under the bus. The memo was approved by no less than three senior ministry staff, but the email and the memo clearly expresses the opinion that you are breaking the established rules of public appointments.

Minister, you got caught and, rather than admitting responsibility, you're blaming senior officials who are just doing their job. Will you step aside until the Integrity Commissioner completes his investigation?

Hon. David Orazietti: Mr. Speaker, this question is completely reprehensible. The member is being critical of me for making an appointment that I never made and for not following advice that I never received. My deputy did not have that information. The deputy did not receive that information. That is disgusting.

We have an open and transparent public appointments process that applies to all Ontarians, and we follow that in our ministry. I cannot believe this individual—a junior-level staff person in our ministry, who was helping his office with another matter related to our ministry, inadvertently sent his constituency staff an email and attempted to recall it. It had confidential advice to me that I had never yet seen nor the deputy had seen.

Instead of recognizing that, he chose to politicize it and make a media circus out of it. It's disgusting—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Order, please. Thank you. It's never too late to ask somebody to leave.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, I would.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in welcoming, in the east members' gallery, the former member from Ottawa Centre in the 34th, 36th, 37th and 38th Parliaments, Mr. Richard Patten.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Also, I have some extremely sorry and sad news. This is—

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Don't say it, Speaker. No, don't say it, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm bound by duty to announce it: This is the last day for our pages. We want to thank them for their service to Ontario.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've also been told that they're volunteering to come back next week.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, I also wanted to introduce a good friend who is visiting from Ottawa, Mr. Art Ivantchouk. Welcome to Queen's Park.

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 64 relating to the allocation of time on Bill 172, An Act respecting greenhouse gas.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1146 to 1151.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On Wednesday, April 20, 2016, Ms. Jaczek moved government notice of motion number 64. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anderson, Granville	Hoggarth, Ann	Moridi, Reza
Baker, Yvan	Hoskins, Eric	Murray, Glen R.
Ballard, Chris	Hunter, Mitzie	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Naqvi, Yasir
Bradley, James J.	Kiwala, Sophie	Orazietti, David
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Potts, Arthur
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Marie-France	Qaadri, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Crack, Grant	MacCharles, Tracy	Sandals, Liz
Damerla, Dipika	Malhi, Harinder	Sergio, Mario
Del Duca, Steven	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	Martins, Cristina	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Matthews, Deborah	Thibeault, Glenn
Dickson, Joe	McGarry, Kathryn	Vernile, Daiene
Dong, Han	McMahon, Eleanor	Wong, Soo
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Fraser, John	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David
Gravelle, Michael	Milczyn, Peter Z.	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul
Bailey, Robert	Gretzky, Lisa	Munro, Julia
Barrett, Toby	Hardeman, Ernie	Natyshak, Taras

Bisson, Gilles
Brown, Patrick
Campbell, Sarah
Coe, Lorne
DiNovo, Cheri
Fedeli, Victor
Fife, Catherine
Forster, Cindy
French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne

Harris, Michael
Hatfield, Percy
Hillier, Randy
Horwath, Andrea
Jones, Sylvia
Mantha, Michael
Martow, Gila
McDonell, Jim
McNaughton, Monte
Miller, Norm

Nicholls, Rick
Scott, Laurie
Singh, Jagmeet
Smith, Todd
Tabuns, Peter
Thompson, Lisa M.
Vanthof, John
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John

Vietnamese heritage and freedom flag, the scarf's design symbolizes the enduring strength of the Vietnamese community.

Mr. Speaker, I hope my colleagues from all parties will join me in celebrating Journey to Freedom Day, and in recognizing both the hardships the Vietnamese refugees had to endure and their many contributions to Canadian society and public life.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 53; the nays are 38.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As there are no further deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1155 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Julia Munro: I would just say what a pleasure it is to be joined here today by many leaders of Canada's Vietnamese community in the gallery.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to welcome to the gallery this afternoon Dr. Mehmet Bor, the co-president of the Federation of Canadian Turkish Associations; Mrs. Yildiz Ünsal, treasurer of the Turkish Federation Community Foundation; Mr. Ismail Vataner, past president, Turkic Assembly of Canada; and—oh, she's not here—Mrs. Nuriye Astalos. She's coming back from—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): She's on her way in.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: She's on her way in.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY

Mrs. Julia Munro: Today I rise to speak about Journey to Freedom Day, a particularly important day for Canadians of Vietnamese heritage. Originally introduced in Canada's Senate by Senator Ngo, who is here today, Journey to Freedom Day commemorates the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and celebrates their acceptance in Canada. Many of the refugees escaped by boat, earning the name "the boat people." Following the end of the war, Canada accepted thousands of refugees—new citizens who are making a wonderful contribution to our society here in Ontario.

Journey to Freedom Day is a very symbolic day. It is about more than recognizing the challenges of the past. It also celebrates the contributions of the Vietnamese community towards building our great country.

Today, we are lucky to be joined by many Ontarians of Vietnamese heritage. It is especially an honour to have, for the first time, all MPPs wearing scarves representing Vietnamese freedom and heritage. Based on the

GIRLS' GOVERNMENT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I didn't have a member statement that day, but April 12 was the day, in 1917, that women achieved the vote in Ontario. Something did happen that day here in the House that was momentous: It was Girls' Government Day, and I tabled a bill to make April 12 Girls' Government Day every year on behalf of Equal Voice. There were over 50 girls here from I think over six ridings who gathered to talk about politics, to meet with cabinet ministers and to see how this place works.

Certainly, we do this for a reason, because Canada has not a great record, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the number of women elected to public office. In fact, we're 46th in the world—46th—well behind most of Europe and behind Australia. We should be ashamed. We have a lot of catching up to do.

What I would suggest to my fellow MPPs is that if you have not hosted a Girls' Government session in your riding, please do so. The template is there; Equal Voice has it and my office has it. It's easy to do. Your constituency staff for the most part can run it. It's win-win because you get to meet the principals, you get to meet the teachers, you get to meet the girls, and they get to see this awesome place. My girls are also going to Ottawa; that's coming up and they're looking forward to it. So please, if you haven't had a Girls' Government group, do initiate one in your riding. We will help and Equal Voice will help.

Here's to women getting the vote.

JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Mr. Speaker, before I make a statement, I would also like to welcome Vietnamese Canadian leaders to Queen's Park.

On April 30, Vietnamese Canadians in my great riding of Mississauga-Brampton South, and across Ontario and Canada, will observe Journey to Freedom Day. This day recalls Canada's acceptance of more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees who fled their homeland at the end of the Vietnam War.

We remember this incredible victory over adversity: the perilous high seas journey undertaken by the refugees to finally arrive in Canada.

We know Canadians' generosity and hospitality have no bounds. We witnessed this again when our country welcomed 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada.

In 1986, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded the Nansen Refugee Award to the

people of Canada, making us the first and only people to have been honoured collectively with this award.

Today, Ontario is home to over 100,000 people of Vietnamese origin. Mr. Speaker, I stand with the Vietnamese community to say thank you for the significant contributions it has made, and continues to make, to Ontario and Canada, and to honour Journey to Freedom Day.

JOHNNY WHITTEKER

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to rise today on behalf of my residents of Stormont, Dundas and South Glengarry to remember Johnny Whitteker and his contributions to the township of Williamsburg, South Dundas and the counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry.

Johnny was first elected to the Williamsburg township in 1954 by a mere 13 votes and went on to serve for 52 consecutive years on the township council, including as the first mayor of the new amalgamated township of South Dundas in 1997. He also served on the SD&G county council for 47 years, where both my dad and I had the privilege of working with him. He was county warden in 1975. He was a member of South Nation Conservation Authority for 41 years and the Eastern Ontario Health Unit for 26. In addition, Johnny was a successful farmer with a herd of over 600 cows, split evenly between beef and dairy, and a long-time member of the choir at St. Peter's Lutheran Church.

To say Johnny was not afraid of hard work would be an understatement. His former road superintendent quickly learned that you didn't take a problem to Johnny on a sunny workday because you would have to return that night after chores and drive him out to resolve the problem, making for an extra-late night.

In his 47 years on county council, he only missed one meeting, and that was because he broke his leg the night before, playing hockey at the age of 70. Johnny was a smart hockey man, an avid Gordie Howe and Detroit Red Wings fan.

If he had one fault, it would have been his red political leaning.

Perhaps the best comment I heard about Johnny was from a fellow council member of 30 years, Robert "Rowdy" Gillard, who said, "His life was well-lived. Anyone who didn't know Johnny Whitteker, should have."

On behalf of the residents of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, I want to offer my sympathy to his wife, Audrey, and his family. Thanks for lending Johnny to us.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Catherine Fife: Since the government announced funding changes three weeks ago, parents of children with autism have voiced their concerns loudly about the irresponsible decision to kick children over the age of five off the waiting list for IBI therapy. The government responds with its numbers: \$333 million invested; 16,000

new spaces; only \$8,000 given to families kicked off the wait-list.

To the Ontarians affected by autism, this is about so much more than numbers. It's about families and children and, indeed, the future of this province. But if the Liberal government only wants to refer to numbers, then let's look at some: 85% of Ontario children currently undergoing IBI are over the age of five; in 2012, more than 14,000 Ontario public school children were identified as autistic; one in 88 children in the TDSB were on the autism spectrum.

Last year, the TDSB faced a \$22-million shortfall in special education funding; the Toronto Catholic board, \$43 million. Supports for children with complex needs are underfunded across the province. This decision will cost school boards, teachers and school communities across this province. We can't afford not to support these families. These children can have so much to contribute to the province if we help them unlock their potential. It's not too late to fix this damaging policy.

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MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S DAY

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It's an enormous pleasure to welcome my friends—benim arkadaşlar—from the Canadian Turkish community today to join us as we celebrate Multicultural Children's Day. Hoşgeldiniz. This day was first dedicated to the world's children by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, on April 23 1920, and adapted by UNICEF in 1979. April 23 promotes love, friendship and peace, bringing together children from nations around the world to share their culture, sing songs in their national languages and perform folk dances in their cultural costumes.

As our Turkish community shares this wonderful tradition here in Ontario, it brings many children of diverse origin together and encourages them to explore the richness of cultural differences and establish new, long-lasting relationships. The goal, of course, is to shape a better, stronger Canada, find the strength and beauty in our diversity and coexist in peace and harmony.

On behalf of my colleagues in the House, I wish all children in Canada of all ethnic origins a very happy multicultural day.

ORDRE DE LA PLÉIADE

M^{me} Gila Martow: Je veux souhaiter mes félicitations aux récipiendaires de l'Ordre de la Pléiade de cette année. Les honneurs ont été remis lors d'une merveilleuse cérémonie cette semaine ici à Queen's Park. Nous avons reconnu et célébré six francophones de partout dans la province qui ont reçu la prestigieuse médaille de l'Ordre de la Pléiade, qui est l'Ordre de la Francophonie et du dialogue des cultures de l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, l'APF. Cette décoration est destinée à reconnaître le mérite des personnalités qui se sont distinguées en servant les idéaux de l'APF et la francophonie.

Je veux parler un petit peu d'un des récipiendaires. Il y en a six. Je les nomme : M. Alain Beaudoin, M^{me} Diane Dubois, M. Pierre Foucher, M^{me} Lorraine Hamilton, M. Louis Patry et M^{me} Carmen Portelance.

Alain Beaudoin est le président de l'AFRY, l'Association des francophones de la région de York. Je travaille très souvent avec eux. Ils ont plusieurs événements et même un camp d'été dans la région de York.

Au nom du Parti PC de l'Ontario et au nom de notre chef, Patrick Brown, profitez, tous les récipiendaires, de la célébration avec vos familles et vos amis, car votre dévouement à la francophonie est grandement apprécié.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Ms. Daiene Vernile: It is with great pleasure that I share with you and members of this House a recent experience at Kitchener's Sunnyside Public School's diversity day. Now more than ever, it's important to understand and celebrate different cultures around the world, especially for our future generations.

Last Friday, Sunnyside hosted its third annual celebration of diversity. Students, parents and teachers had the opportunity to storytell, watch and dance through the world's continents. With over 50 different nations represented and many different languages spoken, it felt like the entire world was brought together at this school in Kitchener.

One of the guests had an incredible story to share. Charles Mulli and wife, Esther, along with 20 of the children from Mulli Children's Family, were visiting the school from Nairobi and performed traditional Kenyan songs and dances. They're currently on a tour of Canada. This foundation helps children around the world living on the streets who face abandonment, abuse, addictions and HIV/AIDS. The foundation ensures that they have a home and access to health care, and a sense of belonging.

Sunnyside Public School's diversity day is an important and delightful tradition. In fact, at one point they were having a fashion show and these Kenyan kids decided to jump on the stage and do their own fashion show. They strutted around, showing us what they were wearing. It was quite funny.

I hope that this tradition continues in the years to come.

CARNATION REVOLUTION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise to celebrate the 42nd anniversary of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, which ushered an era of democracy into Europe and Latin America.

The Carnation Revolution was the single-day culmination of a long struggle but was notable in that, in its last stages, the revolutionary soldiers and people did not use direct violence but came together peacefully to overthrow and transform the Portuguese government from a 40-year dictatorship to a successful democracy. It has been said that the population, holding red carnations, convinced the

regime's soldiers not to resist. The soldiers readily swapped their bullets for flowers.

Replacing the longest-serving dictatorship in Europe, creating democratic institutions and finding new sources of prosperity were urgent priorities for the new Portuguese regime. Nicknamed the Carnation Revolution after how flower vendors handed out seasonal blooms to the soldiers, the almost bloodless uprising remains a source of immense pride for many Portuguese and Portuguese Canadians.

The 25th of April association of Toronto has been promoting the history of the revolution for over a few decades. Earlier this week, I welcomed representatives from this organization from my riding of Davenport, along with Colonel Rui Guimarães who was visiting from Portugal. I had a chance to personally thank them for their commitment and wish them a happy anniversary.

It is with great pride that I stand here today as a beneficiary of the courage and compassion of so many hundreds of thousands of Portuguese men and women that helped transform Portugal into the country that is today.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Durham on a point of order, I believe.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Yes, a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would I like to take the opportunity to welcome Alexandra Rostetter, from the lovely riding of Durham. She lives in Bowmanville and she's here visiting the Legislature today. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

A point of order from the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise today on a point of order: This is Harry Blackwell's last day as a page, but he's joined by Jack, Geoff and Joan from his family, his brother, his father and his grandmother. Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (NUMBER PLATES AND CARRYING RACKS), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (PLAQUES D'IMMATRICULATION ET SUPPORTS DE TRANSPORT)

Mr. Norm Miller, Ms. McMahon moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 191, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to Number Plates and Carrying Racks /
Projet de loi 191, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui a trait aux plaques d'immatriculation et aux supports de transport.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to thank the member from Burlington for co-sponsoring this bill with me.

The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act. If a carrying rack, such as a bicycle rack, is mounted on the rear of a motor vehicle in accordance with the regulations made under the act, a person may drive the vehicle on a highway even if the rack obscures the number plate for the vehicle that is required to be attached to the rear of the vehicle.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introduction of bills? The member from Brampton-Erindale.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: Mississauga-Erindale.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mississauga-Erindale. I'll get it right one of these days.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: I hope so.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That sounded like a challenge to the Chair.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: A gentle challenge, Mr. Speaker.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (KEEP OUR ROADS SAFER THROUGH THE USE OF INTELLIGENT DRIVE TECHNOLOGIES), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE ACCRUE GRÂCE À L'EMPLOI DE TECHNOLOGIES DE CONDUITE INTELLIGENTE)

Mr. Takhar moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 192, An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to lifesaving technologies / Projet de loi 192, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui concerne les technologies permettant de sauver des vies.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not sure if I'm going to give the member a moment to have a short statement. Yes I will. The member for a short statement.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill amends the Highway Traffic Act to provide the Lieutenant Governor in Council with the authority to make regulations relating to life-saving technology requirements for vehicles.

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MOTIONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Motions. Motions. Last call for motions.

Oh, just in time. The deputy House leader.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. James J. Bradley: This is a unanimous consent, Mr. Speaker; I was looking at the unanimous consent section in the standing orders.

I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the membership of a standing committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Bradley is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committee:

That on the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, Mr. MacLaren be replaced by Mr. Bailey.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Bradley moves that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committee:

That on the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, Mr. MacLaren be replaced by Mr. Bailey.

Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Today in this House, we mark a very solemn day, and that is the Day of Mourning. It's a day when we pause to honour and remember all the people who have been killed or have been injured on the job.

The Day of Mourning is a day established to mark a very important event for people who work. It was on April 28, 1914, that the Ontario Legislature of the time passed the first workers' compensation act, and 102 years later, we use it as a day to remember, to reflect and to commit to a safe future.

We remember those lives that were lost or are forever changed by the simple act of just going to work. We reflect upon the past, and we know the great strides that we've made in this country and this province in health and safety over the years. We owe that to the commitment and the dedication of those who fight for workplace health and safety on a daily basis. We commit to making workplace health and safety a personal priority and to take action to prevent future workplace tragedies.

The human toll caused by workplace deaths, injuries and illnesses is immense. That's why we must constantly strive to improve our record when it comes to workplace health and safety.

As a province, together we've come a long way. I can stand in this House, Speaker, and I'm proud to tell you that since 2003, our province's annual rate of workplace injuries has dropped significantly. It has dropped by more

than 40%. That makes Ontario workplaces among the safest in the world. While I'm proud of that, I'm not satisfied with that.

Despite this progress, too many people continue to lose their lives or suffer an injury or illness simply because they showed up to work to try to make a living for themselves or their family. There is no job on this planet that's worth a life. There is no job that's worth an injury. We know we simply cannot rest as long as one person continues to be injured on the job.

We also know that regulation and enforcement, as important as they are, simply alone are not enough. We have to change the attitude in our society. Workplace injuries cannot be seen or tolerated as just the cost of doing business. Safety in the workplace should be as routine as buckling up the seat belt in your car.

We challenge employers, we challenge labour groups and we challenge the people who go to work to do their part in building a culture of safety in the workplace. I want to stress that this also includes mental health and psychological safety in the workplace. Mental health, for some, remains a new frontier in workplace health and safety, but we're working hard with our partners to change that attitude. One day, I'd like to see concerns about workplace mental health on the same footing as physical health.

Speaker, as we honour the dead and the injured today, we must all remember in this House that we have a duty ourselves to advance workplace health and safety. Today I rise with the privilege of being the Minister of Labour, but I know I echo the sentiments of all members of this House and past Ministers of Labour across all party lines when I say that workplace deaths and injuries are tragic, unacceptable, preventable and not to be tolerated. I also speak to you today as parents and as members of our community. We must dedicate ourselves to doing what we can so that young people who are just going into the workforce understand health and safety, and also return home every day safe and sound. I'd urge each member in the House today to use the influence and the respect they're accorded in their own communities to make workplace health and safety a personal priority, not only for the people of Ontario who you represent, but for your friends, your families and your communities.

Speaker, very shortly, I understand, we'll observe a moment of silence. We're going to remember those who have died, been injured or become ill just as a result of going to work. We will honour their memories much more strongly if every one of us takes action to ensure that no further tragedies occur. We simply owe it to all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I am honoured to rise in this House this afternoon, on behalf of the people of Wellington-Halton Hills, the leader of the official opposition and the Ontario PC caucus, in solemn observance of the Day of Mourning. The Day of Mourning is the day when we join together with all Canadians to remember those who have died on the job. It's a day to remember the terrible human

cost of these workplace accidents and the impact they have on the families who are left behind. The Day of Mourning is a day to remember the people who left for work in the morning, just like each one of us, but never came home. We also think of those who left for work in the morning and then suffered serious injuries or contracted occupational diseases that would change their lives forever.

We pause to remember. We pause to remember Sean Kells. Sean was only 19 years old when he died in a preventable workplace accident in Brampton. In November 1994, on just his third day on the job, he was pouring a highly flammable chemical from one underground drum to another when it ignited and exploded. He died the next day from third-degree burns. With the most tragic consequences possible, Sean was never told that what he was doing was dangerous or that he should be taking precautions. After Sean's death, his father, Paul Kells, made it his life's mission to prevent these kinds of workplace accidents from happening. In 1996, he launched the Safe Communities Foundation, which became the largest nationally recognized injury prevention organization in Canada.

I also want to remember Aleksey Blumberg, Alexander Bondorev, Fayzullo Fazilov and Vladimir Korostin, who died on the job in a Christmas Eve scaffolding accident that we all know about, in Toronto, in 2009. Horrifically, they fell 13 storeys to their deaths when the scaffold that they were working on snapped. Their colleague Dilshod Marupov was also seriously injured and suffered a fractured spine and ribs. The construction company they were working for and its owner were fined \$342,500 in connection with the deaths. The court found that the project manager was also aware that five of his workers were not wearing safety harnesses, and he was eventually sentenced to three and a half years in prison. Like many other similar cases, these deaths could have been prevented. I repeat: They did not need to happen. Those workers could have spent Christmas with their families and could still be with us today.

According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, in 2014 there were 919 workplace deaths recorded in Canada, and that's up from 902 in 2013. This represents an average of more than two deaths on the job each and every day across our country. From 1995 to 2014, over 18,000 people lost their lives due to work-related causes across Canada, an average of 918 deaths per year.

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What is even more tragic is that it's estimated that 90% of these workplace deaths are entirely preventable. It follows that the deaths of Sean Kells, Aleksey Blumberg, Alexander Bondorev, Fayzullo Fazilov and Vladimir Korostin were entirely preventable. They are tragic examples of what can happen when safety is not a priority and when property safety measures are not put in place.

Each and every employer across Ontario has a responsibility to put the safety of their workers as one of

their highest priorities. Most employers, and certainly the employers that I know and talk to, take this responsibility seriously. They care about their employees and they want to do the right thing. They would be horrified if one of their employees were killed or injured while on the job, and they put the appropriate measures in place to prevent a tragedy like this from happening.

Ontario's businesses want workplaces to be safe, but we all have a role to play. Employees can take steps on their own to avoid dangerous situations. We know that under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, workers have the right to refuse to do work that they believe is unsafe and can put them in harm's way.

The Day of Mourning is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to ensure that all our workplaces are safe. As MPPs, we must work together to improve workplace safety, with the goal of preventing any death or injury in the workplace. We have a responsibility to ensure that workplace safety is a priority and that our workplaces become safer, not more hazardous.

Each and every Ontarian has the right to a safe workplace environment. Each and every Ontarian has the right to expect that when they leave for work in the morning, they will be able to come home to their families at the end of the day, for we know that even one death or injury in the workplace is one too many.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm honoured to stand in this House today and speak on behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus, as New Democrats join with workers across Ontario to mark the National Day of Mourning. Today we stand with friends and families to remember those who have been injured, maimed or killed on the job.

We all have a responsibility to make sure that when the workday ends, every worker makes it home safely.

In Ontario every year, hundreds of people are killed on the job, thousands are injured, and countless more people have to deal with complications due to work-related environmental illnesses and trauma that they experience on the job. There is an epidemic of injuries and death in the workplaces of this province, particularly facing young workers who are just starting out in their lives and begin their time in the workforce with a tragedy that ends in either loss of life or significant problems that will haunt them for the rest of their lives.

Speaker, what this reflects is an abysmal failure of public policy and a culture of workplace acceptance of the expendability of workers, and we continue to allow that to persist here in this province. It is absolutely unacceptable, and it is what causes a trend of unacceptably high numbers of deaths that continue to this day, notwithstanding the fact that year in and year out we all get up in this chamber and rue the reality that we have here in Ontario. It's far too many people. In 2014, 233 Ontarians lost their lives at work.

As a province, we have a duty to honour our obligations to these workers and to all workers, and we do this by actually ensuring that workplace safety standards reflect the changing nature of our workplaces, in traditionally hazardous fields—for example, construc-

tion, which continues to be a killer, manufacturing, mining, forestry, and other hazardous workplaces—and in occupations such as nursing and corrections.

Conditions are so bad in corrections—and we've seen it play out here in this province recently—that the workers in those institutions actually have T-shirts made that say "Job #1: Everyone goes home." That's how dangerous a workplace this government has allowed those corrections facilities to become. That's where action needs to happen. That's where the obligation of government needs to start: in the government's own workplaces here.

It's the same thing in hospitals. I was shocked to visit with nurses in southwestern Ontario and receive a chart that shows the number of injuries that occur in nursing, that I'm sure people aren't even aware of, the number of injuries around workplace violence, around exposures, around falls. It is a violent workplace that our health care professionals work in, and it's something that government needs to do something about, not just talk about it once a year when it comes to the National Day of Mourning.

But we also have to have safety standards that reflect the rise of part-time and precarious work that has occurred under this Liberal government, which is leaving far too many workers vulnerable to greater workplace risks and leaves them less able to speak up about workplace safety for fear of losing their jobs—another whole sector of workers who are vulnerable because of this government's lack of action.

I'm proud to stand with a caucus that has been working to implement greater workplace protections: helping to protect the rights of interns in the workplace and many others; helping to protect child performers at work; helping first responders and front-line health care and corrections workers get recognition and treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, because not all workplace injuries are physical, but these psychological injuries, as we know, are no less dangerous and no less impactful to not only the worker but also to their families.

This government has all too often dragged its feet on important health and safety measures and in acknowledging when some workers in this province are ringing the alarm bells about conditions in their workplaces. Every injury and every death in the workplace is one too many, but every year we see these tragic events on construction sites, on the factory floor, in fields, underground, at hospitals, in corrections facilities and in communities from one end of the province to the other as first responders go about their work.

When this happens, families in the north, across the industrial heartland, in rural areas and in our cities are left to pick up the pieces of their lives when their loved ones are suddenly taken from them at work. Every working person in Ontario and their families has the right to peace of mind, Speaker. No Ontarian should ever have to worry if a loved one will go to work and never come home.

New Democrats are committed to strong safety regulations and enforcement. We're committed to working with

employers, unions, safety specialists and the WSIB to make workplaces safer for every Ontarian. We can't stop until workplace injuries and deaths stop. Until then, we mourn the dead and fight for the living.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Kingston and the Islands on a point of order.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would belatedly like to acknowledge Nazif Kurt, vice-president of the Turkish Culture and Folklore Society of Canada, who I believe has just stepped out for a minute but who has been with us today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their comments. It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Michael Harris: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

I'll sign it and send it down with Mac from Kitchener-Conestoga.

PRIVATISATION DES BIENS PUBLICS

M. Taras Natyshak: J'ai une pétition ici à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario qui dit :

« Attendu que la privatisation d'Hydro One est un aller sans retour; et

« Attendu que nous allons perdre des centaines de millions de revenus fiables d'Hydro One pour nos écoles et nos hôpitaux; et

« Attendu que nous allons perdre le plus gros atout économique provincial et le contrôle de notre avenir dans le secteur de l'énergie; et

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« Attendu que nous allons payer de plus en plus pour l'électricité, tout comme ce qui est arrivé ailleurs;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario comme suit :

« D'arrêter la vente d'Hydro One et de faire en sorte que les familles de l'Ontario, comme propriétaires d'Hydro One, en bénéficient, maintenant et pour les générations à venir. »

J'appuie cette pétition. Je vais la signer et l'envoyer avec Maya.

HOME INSPECTION INDUSTRY

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Davenport.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I proceed to read the petition, this is the first time I've had the opportunity to stand in this House with you in the chair as Speaker. Congratulations. You look fabulous there and you're doing a fabulous job.

This petition I have here is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the home inspector industry remains largely unregulated; and

"Whereas homeowners are increasingly reliant on home inspectors to make an educated home purchase; and

"Whereas the unregulated industry poses a risk to consumers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To protect consumers by regulating the home inspection industry and licensing home inspectors."

I agree with this petition and will affix my name and send it to the table with page Jack.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Julia Munro: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician

services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I have affixed my signature, as I am in agreement, and I give it to page Amelia.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Wayne Gates: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I'll sign my name to the petition as well.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Lorne Coe: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

Speaker, I agree with the content of this particular petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Zachary.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I have a petition to read. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the throne on February 6, 1952; and

"Whereas her coronation was on June 2, 1953; and

"Whereas she has reigned over the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand since her ascension in 1952; and

"Whereas as of September 2015, she broke the record held by her great-great-grandmother Queen Victoria by being on the throne for 63 years and seven months; and

"Whereas she's the world's oldest reigning monarch;

"We, the undersigned, congratulate the Queen on the occasion of her 90th birthday."

I agree with this petition, I affix my signature and I give it to the page from Scarborough Southwest, Jack.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mrs. Julia Munro: "Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

“Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

“Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

“Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation.”

As I am in agreement, I affix my signature to give it to page Christina.

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas thousands and thousands of adults live with pain and infection because they cannot afford dental care;

“Whereas the promised \$45-million dental fund under the Poverty Reduction Strategy excluded impoverished adults;

“Whereas the programs were designed with rigid criteria so that most of the people in need do not qualify; and

“Whereas desperately needed dental care money went unspent and was diverted to other areas even though people are still suffering without access to dental care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly do all in its power to stop the dental fund being diverted to support other programs; and

“That the Legislative Assembly fully utilize the commissioned funding to provide dental care to those in need.”

I totally agree. I’m signing it and giving it to Sabrina to be delivered to the table.

LUNG HEALTH

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to once again rise in this House and read a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children and youth living with asthma;

“Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

“In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs

the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

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“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To allow for deputations on MPP Kathryn McGarry’s private member’s bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

“Once debated at committee, to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through the committee stage and back to the Legislature for third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage.”

I agree with this petition, affix my name and send it to the table with page Harry.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I’m pleased to sign my signature and give it to page Lauren.

PRIX DE L’ESSENCE

M. John Vanthof: J’ai une pétition pour l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario.

« Alors que les automobilistes du nord de l’Ontario continuent d’être soumis à des fluctuations marquées dans le prix de l’essence; et

« Alors que la province pourrait éliminer les prix abusifs et opportunistes et offrir des prix justes, stables et prévisibles; et

« Alors que cinq provinces et de nombreux états américains ont déjà une réglementation des prix d'essence; et

« Considérant que les juridictions qui réglementent le prix de l'essence ont : moins de fluctuations des prix, moins d'écarts de prix entre les communautés urbaines et rurales et des prix d'essence annualisés inférieurs;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« D'accorder à la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario le mandat de surveiller le prix de l'essence partout en Ontario afin de réduire la volatilité des prix et les différences de prix régionales, tout en encourageant la concurrence. »

I agree wholeheartedly, affix my signature and give it to page Khushali.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the term "employment" within the Ontario Human Rights Code of workplace harassment also includes activities or events that happen outside of normal business hours or off business premises, but are linked to the workplace and employment, and recommends that all Ontario workplace harassment and sexual harassment policies recognize this definition.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mrs. McGarry has moved private member's notice of motion number 70. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: There is no place, anytime, anywhere, for sexual harassment or misogyny. It's sad that, in 2016, issues of sexual harassment in the workplace are still prevalent. It's incumbent upon all of us to stand up and simply say it's never okay.

We've heard the motion with regard to workplace harassment. This motion acknowledges that workplace harassment and sexual harassment policies should also apply in settings outside of business hours.

Increasingly, more and more people are working beyond the traditional 9-to-5 workday, and employment is increasingly taking work beyond the four walls of an office or place of work. We wouldn't want to think that employers didn't act immediately on complaints because there was a perceived loophole that didn't clearly define the workplace as including work-related activities outside the workplace.

I recognize that 28% of Canadians, or one in three people, have experienced sexual harassment in their place of work or at a work-related function. We need to keep showing leadership when it comes to incidents of workplace harassment. My job takes me around the province and to many different settings, and I want everyone to feel safe and be free from workplace harass-

ment while doing their work, even out of the workplace. This motion recognizes that.

I sat as a member of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment, as did several members in the House this afternoon. I know we were all privileged to be able to add to the important debate on this around the province. In our travels around different communities, we heard from many folks who are survivors of sexual violence and harassment, including sexual harassment in the workplace. We had hundreds of submissions and phone calls to our committee, really underscoring the important work we were doing and the important conversation that we undertook. I know that many who were involved in the select committee and with the development of the sexual violence and harassment action plan wanted to be here today to show their support. However, they're actually attending the violence-against-women permanent round table meeting this afternoon, building on the work we did in the select committee and on what we are discussing in the House here today.

I am proud to be part of a government that has shown such leadership on this file, and I'm proud that these issues have now come into the forefront of the political debate not only in Ontario but across Canada as well. Sexual violence and harassment are widespread, deep-seated issues and are a reality in every community in this province. These are systemic and entrenched social issues. This problem crosses all social boundaries. It can occur anytime, anywhere, anyplace.

When the committee met to hear public consultations, the vice-president of student affairs from Wilfrid Laurier University, David McMurray, presented. He said that men should be part of the solution to sexual violence and harassment. And he said this: "Men are violent, silent, or actively engaged in meaningful change."

Our government has confronted these entrenched ideas head-on. In fact, the select committee's final report recognized the positive steps that our government has taken to do just that. Quoting the report:

"The select committee believes that the government's plan to increase awareness of sexual violence and harassment through public education campaigns is a positive step towards shifting social norms, challenging existing behaviour, encouraging bystander intervention, and supporting people who have experienced sexual violence and harassment in coming forward.

"Numerous witnesses who appeared before the committee expressed their support for the government's multimedia campaign #WhoWillYouHelp as a means of creating conversations and educating people about sexual violence and harassment. As noted by Colleges Ontario, 'it is ... a powerful wake-up call to the seriousness and pervasiveness of the problem, and the role of bystanders, which needs to be addressed.'

"Indeed, bystander intervention programs are a promising approach to sexual violence prevention, as they encourage the community as a whole to take ownership of sexual violence and harassment as a problem. These programs are effectively being delivered in a number of

environments, including schools, workplaces, public spaces and online.”

Over 83 million people across the world participated in the #WhoWillYouHelp campaign in just a few short weeks. Indeed, several of the recommendations from the final report made by the select committee speak to this.

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For example, in recommendation number 3, it recommends that: “The Ontario government expand its public education campaigns pertaining to sexual violence and harassment to reach and connect with diverse segments of Ontario’s population, and target a wider range of behaviours, such as street harassment.”

Recommendation 4: “The Ontario government provide greater support and resources to campaigns that engage men and boys in helping to prevent gender-based violence.”

Recommendation 24: “Greater support be provided to both community- and school-based education programs that work to challenge myths and misconceptions about sexuality and masculinity/femininity, and teach both youth and adults about healthy relationships, consent, and respect.”

Speaker, it is only by openly talking about and confronting these issues that we will achieve progress in eliminating sexual harassment.

In addition to the work by the select committee, I was particularly proud that our government introduced an action plan to stop sexual violence and harassment. If I can quote directly from that plan, under the “Safer Workplaces” section, in speaking to legislation that would strengthen the Occupational Health and Safety Act, it would “set out explicit requirements for employers to investigate and address workplace harassment, including sexual harassment complaints in the workplace, and include an obligation for employers to make every reasonable effort to protect workers from harassment, including sexual harassment, in the workplace.”

One of the more troubling stats that we heard on the select committee is that four out of five Canadians who said they had unwanted experiences did not report these behaviours to their employers.

Madam Speaker, as a newly minted nurse, in my first job at a hospital, I witnessed a doctor make an inappropriate comment while inappropriately touching another nurse, who had just complained to him of having a bad cough. He offered to do a brief examination. Instead of touching her chest with his stethoscope, as he looked like he was going to do, he instead touched her chest with his hand. He laughed, along with his male medical resident, who witnessed this incident. She was shocked, took a step back, and quickly left the nursing station.

I was too intimidated at that time to say anything, which I still feel badly about. When I spoke about it later with the nurse, who was in tears, she was not comfortable in reporting it, and instead took measures to avoid that physician from then on.

This was the misogynistic culture of the day, that issues of sexual harassment were not things to be brought

forward and confronted. Unfortunately, we still today, far too often, run into this culture, that issues of sexual harassment, even when publicly witnessed, are not dealt with by employers immediately.

Speaker, earlier this week, Alberta Conservative MP Michelle Rempel wrote about sexual harassment under the headline “Confront Your Sexism.” While I won’t read to you her entire article today, I wanted to share with you a few sections that were very timely, given the debate this afternoon and the issues that we’ve heard about in the media:

“Last week, I found myself, once again, telling one of the young women on my staff that, ‘It’s important to address sexism in the moment it happens.’”

She goes further, telling readers, “The responsibility for combatting everyday sexism doesn’t lie with those who live with it; it lies with you.”

The article ends by saying, “If you’ve ever held a woman back because you thought they were bossy, or aggressive, why is it her responsibility to tell you why that’s wrong?”

“If you’ve ever sung along to violent misogynistic lyrics, bought a girl a Barbie when they wanted the Meccano set, attributed a woman’s success to her sexual skills, catcalled a woman, assumed a pregnant woman wants her belly to be touched by you, stayed silent during a disgusting sexist joke, assumed your female partner was going to clean your house and make dinner because of traditional gender segregation of housework, stayed quiet while a friend is abusing a woman, or if you’ve abused a woman yourself, you’re the problem, not her.”

“Bottom line, I shouldn’t have to mentor the young women on my staff with tips and tricks to combat sexism.”

“If it’s truly 2016, sexism should be your problem to deal with, not simply ours.”

Speaker, there are still those in our society who continue to perpetuate the misogynistic culture today, continuing to harass others inside or outside of the workplace. Let me be clear: Those who see sexual harassment happening and allow it to go unchecked and unpunished carry the same responsibility for contributing to a culture that is misogynistic.

I have a message from 51% of the population who are made to feel vulnerable, threatened, belittled and dismissed by any boor that comes along: It’s open season. If people are tired of political correctness, then let’s set it aside for a minute and call a spade a spade. A boor is a boor, no matter where they are.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I know that my colleague from Thornhill is also rising in the debate today, and I want to commend my colleague across the floor, from Cambridge, for bringing forward this motion, which I’m happy to support here in the Legislature. “Happy” may not be the right word, but I think it’s about time that we had more clarity on definitions around sexual harassment in the workplace and what is defined as the workplace.

I think the member from Cambridge is pushing this needed debate in the right direction. Hopefully it will end

up in legislation. I know that I and members of my caucus would be very pleased to participate in that to make sure we match the realities of the 2016 workplace.

Let me say, as introductory comments, that certainly sexual harassment can be man on man, it can be woman on woman, it can be woman on man, but the vast preponderance is man-on-woman sexual harassment, something I have always been concerned about as an individual, as an employer—which we all are as well, and have that responsibility—and even more so as the father of two daughters who are still young. It's something I will think a lot more about as we set laws in this province for a better future for them to succeed based on their talents and skills, and not have to face this kind of harassment in the workplace.

The human rights commission has done a number of findings on this. They define employment broadly, including applying and interviewing for a job—the member from Cambridge would have laws cover that; I think that's appropriate—volunteer work, internships and out-of-office activities like Christmas parties and social activities after work. We can't forget that when the laws were written, nobody anticipated the degree to which we would communicate electronically, so text messages, social media—I think all of that is truly an extension of the workplace in many circumstances, and should be covered, as the member rightly captures in her resolution.

There's a human rights case that I'll talk about a little bit, Speaker: *S.S. v. Taylor* 2012, where the vice-chair of the human rights commission found in favour of the complainant—that's the plaintiff, if I'm using it correctly.

The human rights commission goes on: "As Dickson and C.J. explained in *Janzen v. Platy Enterprises* ... the leading decision on the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace ... 'may be broadly defined as unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that detrimentally affects the work environment or leads to adverse job-related consequences for the victims of the harassment.'"

So if it involves colleagues and it's going to impact the workplace, extension of the definition of "workplace" is appropriate in those human rights rulings.

I also want to say something very directly at a top level. As I said, I'd be happy to lend my experience to advancing this if it becomes legislation. I'll be supporting the member's resolution here today. I think we should do so in an era of believing in each other's motives: that they're the right motives and not trying to score political points on this issue.

Let me tell you why this is on my mind. Recently, our leader appropriately disciplined the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, who sits to my right here in the Legislature. That's never easy within a caucus. If that had happened in another party and I had been the leader, I don't think I would have jumped in to try to score political points, as we saw from the Premier.

I'll tell you why that's important for this debate. I remember in the most recent campaign in Niagara West-Glanbrook, in 2014, the candidate who ran against me said some pretty nasty things, Speaker. His name is

David Mossey from Niagara West-Glanbrook. He was the candidate. He posted "Women: Take notice!" on a Facebook post. The post was said to show the difference between butts of women who do squats and those who don't: "I agree, do you?" I was shocked that a candidate would have this type of content for public display and to have this belief set.

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Similarly, the Liberal candidate who ran against my colleague Lisa MacLeod from Nepean-Carleton in 2014, Jack Uppal, said—you won't believe this, Speaker—"Womens brains designed to concentrate multiple tasks at a time.... Mens brains designed to concentrate on only one work at a time."

He said, "Mens brains has a lot of space for handling the analytical process. They can analyze and find the solution for a process and design a map of a building easily. But If a complex map is viewed by women, they can not understand it. Women can not understand the details of a map easily, For them it is just a dump of lines on a paper."

What garbage that this candidate had to say. He went on in many other ways—there was newspaper coverage—where he basically was extraordinarily dismissive of women and their capacity to solve problems.

The point I want to make is I think that it's important to be consistent in these matters. If the Premier of the province suggests that a member should be kicked out of caucus, she actually had three opportunities to get rid of a candidate and refused to do so. They continued to run through the election for the Liberal Party.

Look, if we want to advance this issue, let's do so in a manner of mutual respect, so that our motives are on the same side. Let's not try to score cheap political points by trying to throw gas on the fire. If the Premier had taken corrective action and dismissed the candidates, as I expected she would have, then she could say that about Mr. MacLaren. However, not once, not twice, but three times, there were extraordinarily sexist, anti-women comments by candidates who were allowed to stay in the race. So please be consistent in this debate.

The member for Etobicoke North, as well, has written a novel—I won't get into some of the headlines there—that was similarly disparaging and sexist in nature. I want to point out, Speaker, that he is the parliamentary assistant to the Premier at this point in time.

It's not my style to bring these things up. But I think, because I respect the member for Cambridge a lot—I like her on a personal level. I think she's going places and I hope to see her in cabinet. That would be my recommendation on the next round that comes about.

So I'm going to support her motion. She's on the right path. I think of the future for my daughters. But let's do so in a way that's not trying to play partisan games. I know you wouldn't do that, but the Premier did. Let's leave that behind and focus on doing the right thing for our daughters and our sons.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Kitchener-Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting to follow those particular comments around the political nature of this motion, I have to tell you, because I had some prepared notes.

I just want to pivot back, perhaps, to the story that the member from Cambridge shared with us because that story resonated with me, both from the perspective of being a victim of sexual harassment and also as being a witness to sexual harassment, and also not having the avenues or the mechanisms to follow through and hold accountable the people for whom, quite honestly, for a very long time in the workplace, there has been a culture which has been permissive of sexual harassment.

Following on those comments, with what did happen with the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, if any good can be extracted from that experience, it is the fact that we are actually having a debate about harassment in the workplace and, through this motion, the extension of harassment to events and activities that take place outside of a normal workday.

For us in this House, we have no normal workdays. But for a growing number of Ontarians, the workplace is extended through our personal computers that we have with us all the time. I'm glad that the member mentioned that, as well, because the prevalence of bullying and sexting, if you will, and inappropriate comments has actually been facilitated in many respects through the prevalence of social media. So I think this motion is quite timely.

I do also think, though, that it provides an opportunity for us to address the fact that all legislation that goes through this House should be perceived through that gender lens. How is a piece of legislation—or a regulation, or a directive from a government—affecting women in the province of Ontario? Because, quite honestly, this place is still not reflective of the women that we serve in the province of Ontario. There are only 37 MPPs in this place. Until we have full gender parity, putting that stopgap or that safety measure of having a gender lens may prevent pieces of legislation from moving forward that fail on protecting the rights of all workers in the province of Ontario.

This government did have a unique opportunity to address workplace harassment comprehensively through Bill 132, around amending the Occupational Health and Safety Act to specifically address workplace harassment, which includes workplace sexual harassment, and the seemingly simple change that indicates a small step in the right direction.

We are of the opinion, while we appreciate the motion, that these measures could have been embedded in legislation that has already come before us. Unfortunately, that bill did not include a blanket obligation for employers to protect workers from workplace sexual harassment, so it was another missed opportunity. It did not give the workers the right to refuse work if it will expose them to workplace harassment, which is a big, big issue in the province of Ontario. It did not address the fact that joint health and safety committees should be

consulted in development of sexual harassment policies and programs.

This place does not have a comprehensive strategy around sexual harassment.

It did not require that they notify the leadership of any institution of incidents or complaints. It also did not require employers to inform workers about customers, students, patients, clients or others who have a history of harassment, to allow the worker to take preventive action to protect themselves, to prevent the harassment from happening.

It also didn't include any kind of reprisal protections, which means that workers could be subject to discipline for making a complaint about harassment at work. That is always the threat. There is always risk, when you stand up and you speak out about a violation, that there is a power imbalance in that workplace. For someone who is marginalized in that work setting to have the courage to stand up, they need to know that they are protected. Legislation should be comprehensive in this manner, for all workers.

We know how desperately this kind of protection is needed in Ontario, as much as it may be ignored. Workplace sexual harassment is too common of an occurrence. Of course, we are going to be supporting this motion. But I do want to say that I had the pleasure of being on the committee around the sexual harassment and violence, and those stories that we heard that day in Kitchener—I heard a full day's worth—are still heartbreaking. It is frustrating to be in 2016 and to have this power imbalance continue in the province of Ontario when there are comprehensive mechanisms that could have been in place to protect women.

I will say that I like the campaign “Who Will You Help?” I think it prompts another conversation outside of this place, really out in the real world, if you will. Honestly, I used it as an opportunity to talk to my own daughter, who is 15, about the culture of harassment that she faces day in and day out. That campaign is wonderful, but that campaign needs to be supported comprehensively by a piece of legislation which ensures that the culture of harassment, the power imbalance that has been allowed to exist in our workplaces for too long, is challenged in a very real way. If anything good can come of the incident with the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, it is that we're having this debate today. We should all stand in our place and challenge sexual harassment in the workplace day in and day out—ideally, though, through legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister of Children and Youth Services, and responsible for women's issues.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very pleased to join in this debate. I'm sorry I missed the leadoff from the member who introduced the motion, but I caught the last parts of the couple of rounds just before I rose to speak.

1420

Of course, this is a very serious issue for me as the Ontario minister responsible for women's issues. It's

absolutely important that women feel safe in their workplaces, their homes and their communities.

The Legislature is a place of work. There's no doubt about it. This is where we work. As the member for Kitchener–Waterloo said, and I'm sure others have said before me, our work extends beyond this place, as it often does for employees. Meetings are held outside of workplaces—events, social activities and so on.

I also agree with the member from Kitchener–Waterloo that change is needed to keep evolving in this workplace.

When I was a backbencher, I experienced a very harassing comment from someone in our workplace. It was highly inappropriate. I dealt with it directly and strongly, and I was pleased that it didn't happen again—but it happened, and I think if we actually surveyed our workplace, the Ontario Legislature, I bet you'd find a lot of people have experienced that. It's just unacceptable.

I'm very pleased that the member from Cambridge has brought forward this motion. I know she was on the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment, and I think the work that she and everyone did on that select committee was very, very important. There are other pieces of work going on now that relate to sexual violence and harassment, and we have things going on around human trafficking and so on.

It is important to go back to what our sexual violence and harassment action plan established, because it wasn't there before. It established a commitment, and now we have legislation, to deal with requirements for campuses to provide sexual violence and harassment policies. It amended the Occupational Health and Safety Act to make stronger provisions for employees who are experiencing sexual violence and harassment in the workplace. Of course, there are other provisions around support for survivors and removing barriers in the court system. There was also a very effective public education and awareness-building campaign to change attitudes and build awareness around sexual violence and harassment, because, unfortunately, as we all know, people either don't think it actually exists in their workplace, or they know it exists, but they're not quite sure what it is. They don't know exactly what it looks like sometimes, especially harassment. Harassment can be a particularly subtle form of discrimination. That's why in our public education campaign, the most recent ads focused on the role of bystanders, to help them identify what harassment is, what discrimination is, and what to do when they see a workplace colleague potentially being harassed or violated.

We're very proud of this work on the government side, Speaker. We just did a progress report on that work. Of course, we've also introduced an action plan to end violence against aboriginal women and girls.

I was a bit concerned when I came in the House this afternoon. I have a lot of respect for the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, but I disagree; we shouldn't be talking about political tricks and things like that. This is a very important motion the member has brought forward,

and I'm glad he acknowledged her for doing that. We're here right now, and I think we can all get on the same page about this very important motion. I don't think anyone is here to politicize anything. Harassment is what it is. We've got to deal with it in our own workplace, in other workplaces. This motion is intended to go beyond our workplace here in the Legislature, to all workplaces, and to recognize that outside the bricks and mortar of a building is the extension of a workplace. We know what the Human Rights Code says, and we need to uphold that.

I am very proud of the member from Cambridge for bringing this forward. I sense a lot of support. I just hope we don't get into political barbs about what is a very, very important motion that I believe we all value and can get on the same page for.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today. Of course, we're all supportive of anything that can be done to promote awareness of sexual harassment and violence in the workplace. The discussion today is centring around how exactly we define that workplace.

We do have new legislation, and we're still hoping to see a lot of progress being made in that regard, in terms of employers really understanding and putting the policies in place. It already has definitions that the workplace includes meals outside the actual bricks and mortar of where people work, and conferences. Even Facebook is included in the policies, because potential harassment, even on Facebook, which is the cyber-world, can be brought in and tied in with the workplace. This new legislation really does tighten up the need for policies, reporting and investigations.

I spoke to somebody from Thornhill who is a lawyer, Stuart Rudner. The name of his firm is Rudner MacDonald LLP, if anybody is interested in getting information. He really is advocating for companies to be proactive and to put training and policies in place so that the workers are aware of what the policies are and to keep reminding people. I would almost suggest that public awareness campaigns sometimes have to be a little bit fun and maybe even a little delicious—have a cupcake saying, "Remember workplace" and maybe a code or something like that to remind people every month that these policies are in place and to be cautious and that the company is counting on them.

As a woman, I think there aren't too many women who can say that they have never experienced harassment where they worked or went to school. I have to say that I've been here at the Legislature for two years, and my colleagues have been more than respectful. Maybe they even err too much on the side of conscience, because I don't mind a joke every now and then. But it has been a great place to work and a real eye-opener in terms of how things get done.

I do want to say that, yes, it can be heartbreaking, as the member from Kitchener–Waterloo said, in terms of sexual harassment at the workplace, but also it can be

heartbreaking for women, sometimes, just getting that job, just getting to the workplace, because employers look at them and say, “Hmm, she just got married.” They look them up on Facebook, and they can see they just got married. It’s all out there. They’re thinking, “She’s going to want to start a family very soon.”

What I would encourage, in terms of equality for women, in fact, is for men to have equal parental leave for newborns to what women have. Then maybe employers won’t look at that young woman and think it’s going to be a future problem for them.

I think it’s heartbreaking when women try to leave professions—say, porn or prostitution—and their new employer or fellow employees find out about it and they are made to feel very uncomfortable at work. We can do a lot more here to promote awareness that people, against their will—maybe they were a victim of human trafficking. It’s not enough to rescue the women. We have to ensure that they can get the training they need, get the employment they need and then be treated with respect at that new place of employment.

Stories come up in the news about blackmail. We see TV shows where those lines are very blurred in terms of workplace harassment and violence. Maybe we can do more to—I always go back to the show *Glee*, because I think that they brought in an actor with Down syndrome, an actor in a wheelchair, and what a great PR campaign that was for so many people who stopped seeing a person in a wheelchair and just saw the person and their talents and personality, and good points and bad points.

We heard a few barbs going back and forth here about why this motion is being brought forward. I think the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook was saying that he hopes that the motion isn’t being brought forward to draw attention to anybody—a candidate, an elected official, a former elected official. I would add to his comments that there are even allegations against a previous Liberal Premier in the news, from the *Pan Am*—a sexual harassment suit that’s ongoing.

I think that we all want to raise the public awareness. We want to ensure that all women in the province of Ontario—and men, because, yes, men are victims of sexual harassment by women and other men—that everybody is made to feel safe. It’s really unfortunate when these negative stories come out, and we all feel that maybe there is more that we can do.

Now is a great opportunity to have that discussion and to ensure that everybody enjoys a safe workplace.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Parkdale—High Park.

1430

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Actually, “Madam Speaker” has a lovely ring to it in the context of this discussion.

I want to commend the member from Cambridge. Really, what we’re talking about is what women experience because, let’s face it, it’s mainly what women experience. That experience doesn’t start in the workplace; it starts when we’re young. I would warrant that not a

woman in this place has gone through her entire life without being harassed either at work or on the street or in her home. That is what we experience as women. The hope here is that our daughters will experience a different world, and if not them, then our granddaughters. That’s pretty depressing, in and of itself, to say that.

I’m segueing from the member from Thornhill, the member from Kitchener—Waterloo and the minister in saying that at the basis of what we’re experiencing in the workplace is economic inequality. As long as women are unequal economically in the workplace, we will be possibly victimized in every other way as well.

What are we looking at when we’re looking at women in the workplace? We’re looking at one gender that makes 70 cents plus a bit to every dollar that a man makes. We just—“celebrated” is the wrong word; we just marked equity day on the 19th. What are we looking at when we’re looking at women in the workplace? We’re looking at someone who really does two jobs. If they’ve got children, somebody who goes to work and then goes home and does another job, looks after children, does the housework, etc.—that, 90% of the time, falls to women.

They’re working two jobs, they’re not being paid equally, and the options aren’t there for them. We know that women are not promoted, that women do not make the same amount of money as men because they get passed over for the promotions that men get. We also know that, and that’s of course because women, in part, take more time off to be with their families. It becomes a vicious cycle. We know that women are more precariously employed than men. We know that women are in more part-time jobs and contract jobs than men, and hence paid less.

One of the demands that we should be making is that part-time work be paid the same as full-time work, because economic security is what gives women security. If you talk to women in shelters, as I do, you will speak to women who fled into a shelter and stayed with an abuser as long as they did because they cannot afford to live on their own with their children, certainly nowhere near what they could afford living with a man. It’s economic insecurity. To that end, this government should be behind our \$15-an-hour minimum wage demand, because it’s mainly and mostly women who earn minimum wage, and that needs to stop as well.

A wonderful person who used to work in this place, Kendra Coulter—I’m giving her a shout-out—has written extensively on retail work. It’s mainly and mostly women in retail work. They’re the worst offenders—the most number of men in management; the most number of women on the front lines; the most number of women who are making minimum wage versus some man who’s getting paid a salary that you can actually live on.

When we put forward the PTSD bill over eight years and finally the government picked it up and passed it, guess who they left off? Talk about a gender lens: nurses. Nurses got left off. We tried to amend that bill to include nurses. Nurses experience violence in the workplace. We tried to include them in that bill; the government said no.

That is not seeing things through a gendered lens. That was a missed opportunity.

In terms of online harassment, we have seen some vicious trolling occur to women in this chamber and to women outside this chamber. I remember that many of us got very upset around a certain—I'm not going to grace him with a name—who came to Toronto who was talking about legalizing rape. That he was let into the country was a major slap in the face to all of our women, number one, but we tried to prevent him actually speaking at his self-styled conference. I can tell you that my involvement in that campaign, and other women all around this chamber who were involved in this campaign to keep him out, to not allow people to rent to him—we were viciously trolled online, on Twitter, on Instagram, on Facebook. We had a recent high-profile case where a judge said, "Just get off Twitter"—a male judge. That's not seeing anything through a gendered lens and that's not recognizing that the real workplace of women is online as well as in the workplace, bricks and mortar, wherever they work. Until women are safe online, women will not be safe. Our daughters are certainly not safe online, and we need to look at that as parents as well as legislators.

So, yes, I absolutely support what the member from Cambridge is doing. We need to do so much more, though. We need to do so much more. Until women can earn the same as men, are economically equal to men, we will always be under attack. Let's change that, Madam Speaker, starting with you.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Burlington.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I am pleased to stand in this House today and follow the always eloquent member from Parkdale-High Park, who has been in this place for a long time and for whom I have a great deal of respect. I appreciated her comments about not just what we do in here but what happens outside. I think that's the essence of the conversation and the dialogue that we're having today, Speaker, and I'm going to speak to that, if I may, in my comments, as well.

This subject matter is especially important to me, as I took part in the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment. As a result of that experience, I heard from witnesses who courageously shared their stories about what it's like to work in an environment where misogynistic and sexist behaviour is considered normal. As you know, Speaker, their stories, their observations, resonated with me, and I began to realize just how much I have, like so many women of a certain age who have been around—for me, 30 years—become somewhat immune to the realities that continue to face women every day, not because I don't face them myself, but because, simply put, I, we, so many of us, have become numb to what we see around us. At a certain level, we rage against it, but we also understand or somehow have come to expect that it's part of how we live, and I'm not sure that's right; in fact, I know it isn't. That's why I'm so proud to stand in my place and talk about this important

subject today. That decision to sometimes ignore it helps us to cope with the undeniable fact that every day, even sometimes in this place, I'm sorry to say, there are subtle and pernicious choices, words and actions that demonstrate we still have much to do. After all, this is a workplace too, as the minister mentioned. With people watching, it is undeniably a place where what we do and say really matters.

As has been said, it is 2016, and there's a growing awareness of the importance of a harassment-free workplace and a harassment-free society, as well. Much has been done in the recent past to help put a stop to sexual violence and harassment in Ontario and across Canada, from an important decision to call an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, to a decision to create a gender parity in cabinet—both of those of tremendous value, not just in real terms but symbolically too—and, closer to home, the work of the select committee, as I mentioned, and the creation of Ontario's sexual violence and harassment action plan.

We are going in the right direction, to be sure, but there's more that can be and needs to be done—and, every day, reminders that we need to do both.

We live in a time when everyone has a cellphone and they can record the comments and behaviour of anyone else at any time and in any place. You would think that this increased scrutiny would change people's choices and behaviours, but it hasn't. Combined with the 24-hour news cycle and the Internet, where a video can go viral in a matter of minutes, technology has served to remind us that the public realm exists well beyond the four walls of the workplace. As such, those who behave inappropriately must be held accountable for their decisions.

Imagine a scenario where your boss overhears you in the workplace make a harassing comment to a co-worker. Would you not expect that your employer would take action to ensure that such behaviour is not repeated and is addressed? We must all be accountable for our actions, and our words, too, because words can become weapons. Ask anyone who has suffered abuse at the hands of a partner, a parent, a guardian, a sibling. Why should a colleague be any different?

Ontarians want and deserve both a workplace and a society that is free of harassment: where employers, where colleagues, where we all contribute to a safe and healthy environment. An ill-considered comment or a decision to make a colleague the butt of your jokes is not only damaging to them, but those choices diminish us all.

It is often said that leadership starts at the top. But as someone reminded me recently, leadership exists at many levels in workplaces, and there's always opportunity to show it, to send a clear signal about exactly which behaviours are tolerated and accepted and which are not. Why, then, would your employer not be able to take similar action if you make similar comments, whether you're inside the workplace or outside it?

Brands—and it's often talked about—are important. Regardless of where you find yourself, an employee represents the brand of their employer, and, after all, the

brand is nothing more than the values that underpin the place where we work. Any inappropriate behaviour outside the physical workplace can still reflect negatively on that brand and on that reputation, and as I mentioned, brand equity is a resonant example of the values that underpin where we work.

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This is especially true of us as public figures. As role models in the public spotlight, we must all be held to a higher standard. We do not simply represent our own personal brand, but the brand of those who sent us here, our constituents who elect us to public office. How we treat each other matters. Young Ontarians across the province see how we conduct ourselves. If we expect them to treat each other with kindness, respect and collegiality, then we must do the same.

Speaker, last week I had a group in from my riding for Girls' Government and they attended question period on a day when the debate was difficult. We all know that in this place, feelings run high. But before I went into question period, we had a talk about public life and public service. When we came out we had the same conversation, and I can tell you their desire to represent Ontarians in this place diminished considerably after the time they had spent here in question period. I found that very sad.

When we diminish each other, we chip away at the overall public confidence that we all enjoy and that we all have an obligation to uphold. Although I'm relatively new to this place, I've realized just how dehumanizing it can sometimes become. When we shout over each other, when our conduct is less than becoming, we have effectively stopped listening. It reminds me of the old saying that those who throw dirt also lose ground.

Ontarians expect that they will never have to endure harassment of any kind. Why should the place of work be any different? Arguably, our conduct at work should be a reflection of the values of our workplace, but when it comes to harassment—whether it's on the playing field, on the shop floor, in the board room, in the Ontario Legislature or elsewhere—it should never be tolerated. We all have an obligation to call it out, to name it, to hold people to account when they are out of line, because not to do so, particularly in our case, as I mentioned, diminishes us all.

Allowing employers to amend their workplace harassment and sexual harassment policies to reflect the fact that the workplace no longer simply encompasses the physical location that an employee works in could go a long way to signaling that incidents of sexism, sexual harassment, bullying and hectoring cannot and should not be tolerated. Whether it's a public employee making inappropriate and sexually harassing comments to a reporter, or a colleague making misogynistic jokes at a public event, we all have a responsibility to make a clear statement, Madam Speaker, that it's never okay.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Cambridge to wrap up.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I want to thank the members this afternoon for their comments: the members

from Niagara West–Glanbrook and from Kitchener–Waterloo, the minister responsible for women's issues, and the members from Thornhill, from Parkdale–High Park, and from Burlington.

Madam Speaker, we hear all too often that people are tired of political correctness, but political correctness is just another term for civility. As a society, it's as simple as exercising etiquette and basic good manners, and to simply treat each other with respect. Civility promotes equality, good working relationships, collaboration and success, and reducing workplace harassment is a basic human right.

I want to take this opportunity to give a shout-out to some of the shining examples of employers who expect, demand and support civility and decency from their employees and act swiftly to address employees engaged in sexual harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, workplaces are increasingly updating their own policies to provide a clearer definition of workplace and work activities. This should be the standard across our province.

The term “employment” within the Ontario Human Rights Code should include work-related activities or events that happen outside of normal business hours or off business premises. As we heard earlier today in the discussion, a boor is a boor no matter where they are.

Madam Speaker, I just want to leave everyone with this thought: The way we treat each other is a reflection of who we really are. Therefore, we all win when we treat each other with respect at all times in all places. Thank you.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario supports the federal government's decision to offer a full apology in the House of Commons for the Komagata Maru incident of 1914, and calls upon future federal governments to never again enact immigration laws based on one's religion, ethnicity, gender, race or any other discriminatory grounds.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Dhillon has moved private member's notice of motion number 71. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As you know, this House recognized April as Sikh Heritage Month in Ontario in 2013. This has allowed us, the Sikh community, to share our history, culture and accomplishments with all Ontarians, and helped us keep our heritage alive and well through sharing these stories with younger generations of Ontario-born Sikhs.

Sikhs have been dedicated members of Canadian society for many years. They have contributed to the greatness of this country as hard-working, socially and politically active members of communities across Canada, including Ontario, where the Sikh population is 200,000 strong.

The year 1904 saw the first wave of Sikh immigrants to Canada: 258 Sikhs, according to the census. Among these immigrants was Bhai Arjan Singh, who brought the first Sri Guru Granth Sahib, our holy book, to Canada.

Many will recall the name Baltej Singh Dhillon. He was the first Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer allowed to wear a turban and unshorn beard. A former member of Parliament, the Honourable Gurbax Singh Malhi, our very own MPP Harinder Malhi's father, was the first turbaned Sikh to be elected to the Canadian Parliament.

As our Premier, the Honourable Kathleen Wynne, often reminds us, other than the aboriginal peoples of Canada, we all came from somewhere else. Looking around at my colleagues, I see people from different backgrounds, speakers of different languages and members of different religions.

For many families in Ontario, the journey and struggle to start a better life in Canada in Ontario is still a fresh-lived experience. Madam Speaker, my family came to Canada in the late 1960s. They arrived in Alberta—actually, the border of Alberta and BC—working on farms and hearing stories of not having proper winter clothes and being forced to do jobs that were harder than some and being paid half the wages.

What we can learn from this is that we should pass on these experiences to our future generations. In my house, I make it a priority that my kids know to respect, and not take for granted, the great country they live in. As a matter of fact, when we travel abroad, I remember that one time we were in India and I showed them the schools and hospitals so they know and can appreciate what they have here and preserve and build upon what we have so they can continue to live in a great country and, moreover, leave a better country for future generations.

In the past few days, we saw the raising of the Nishan Sahib, which is the Sikh flag, outside our Legislature for the first time. Just this past Monday, we held the first Sikh prayer, which is called a kirtan, and welcomed the Sri Guru Granth Sahib inside the Ontario Legislature. These are just a few examples of how Ontario and Canada have grown to celebrate and appreciate different cultures, traditions and ways of life.

As we celebrate accomplishments, new and old, it is equally important for us to acknowledge the challenges that those before us faced. It's important that we do not forget the mistakes that were made, and we must ensure that generations ahead do not repeat them. This is a sentiment that many in Ontario will not only understand but relate to as well. Various communities that now call Ontario home first experienced prejudice and uncertainty upon their arrival in this new country.

The multicultural fabric of Ontario and the diversity of Canada are something we are all proud of. We know that Canada and true Canadians strive to uphold the rights and freedoms of all, and to be inclusive and accepting of all, regardless of our differences. But we're not ignorant of the prejudices that existed, the discrimination that was practised and the hatred that stemmed from a lack of acceptance and understanding.

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What makes this even worse is that the prejudices were embedded in Canadian policy and law. This was a systemic racism, one that we continue fighting to eradicate in various aspects of our society.

One such event with significance to the Sikh community is the SS Komagata Maru incident of 1914. May 23, 1914, was a sad day in Canadian history. A ship sailed from Hong Kong to Vancouver. On board were 376 passengers: 12 Hindus, 24 Muslims and 340 Sikhs. After spending over one month at sea, the passengers, on their way to a new, better life, were denied entry into Canada. They were not even permitted to disembark.

For two months, the Komagata Maru and its passengers sat stranded at Vancouver's docks. During this time, the passengers were denied the most basic necessities, such as food and water. I would call this a truly un-Canadian welcome. These poor souls waited on the ship, fighting against hunger and disease, with the hope that they would be granted access to a new life, a prosperous life, a Canadian life. It's hard to think that what they fought so hard for, yet never received, is what so many of us in Ontario are blessed with today.

On July 23, 1914, their hopes were completely crushed. The Canadian government sent two naval ships to escort the Komagata Maru out of Canadian territory. With heavy hearts and empty stomachs, the passengers on board began another two months' journey at sea. Upon their arrival in Calcutta, India, 20 passengers were killed by gunfire, nine were wounded, and the rest were taken as prisoners.

The Komagata Maru incident violated human rights. The Canadian immigration laws that kept the passengers of the Komagata Maru off Canadian soil are a disgrace to what Canada represents.

On August 3, 2008, then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized to the South Asian community in British Columbia. He offered an apology on one hand while he led a government that toyed with restrictive and selective immigration policies that discriminated against certain groups of people. I'm saddened and disturbed to know that members of that former governing party, some of whom sit in this House with us, were privy to that type of discriminatory practice and would have allowed for such policies, ones that remind us of the prejudice faced by the early Sikh and South Asian immigrants.

We are fortunate to have a new government in Ottawa, one that represents the accepting and inclusive nature of true Canadians. That's why Prime Minister Trudeau helped welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada, many of whom have settled in Ontario. We have a federal government, much like our Ontario government, that truly looks like the Canada it represents.

Yet even in such a public arena, we have seen and heard the deep-rooted prejudice and discrimination from members who think it's okay to make fun of a turban or someone who speaks more than one language. Then again, we have also seen and heard the sexist behaviour of some members of this House.

But let me stay focused on this issue.

The laws that violated the rights of those Sikhs and South Asians, the laws that showcased deep-rooted hatred towards immigrants, were not created in Surrey, BC. They were created in the Canadian Parliament. The horrid acts related to the Komagata Maru incident took life in the House of Commons. That is why this Premier, this government and this caucus applaud Prime Minister Trudeau's recent announcement that he will offer a formal apology in the House of Commons for the Komagata Maru incident. This official apology will acknowledge the wrongdoings during that dark time. It will acknowledge that those who suffered through this incident deserve the same respect and dignity that Canada offers to so many people from diverse backgrounds. This official apology will right those wrongs. I support the federal government's decision to offer a full apology for this incident. I also call upon future governments to never again enact discriminatory immigration laws based on one's religion, ethnicity, gender or race.

The Prime Minister's announcement demonstrates Canada's focus on fostering a strong partnership with the Sikh community, a partnership that we can truly celebrate here in Ontario. So as we continue to enjoy Sikh Heritage Month, and as we share stories and memories of the Sikh community's achievements and resilience, let's take a moment to appreciate and acknowledge the sacrifices and struggles that came before us that allowed us to have our time of celebration.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak on this motion, number 34. I just want to read it out again: "That, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario supports the federal government's decision to offer a full apology in the House of Commons for the Komagata Maru incident of 1914 and calls upon future federal governments to never again enact immigration laws based on one's religion, ethnicity, gender, race or any other discriminatory grounds."

I just want to talk a little bit about what the Komagata Maru incident was. It involved a Japanese steamship of that name that sailed from Hong Kong through Shanghai to Japan, then to Vancouver, carrying 376 passengers from Punjab, British India. This was in 1914. Only 24 passengers were admitted to Canada. The other 352 were not allowed to land and were forced to return to India. The passengers comprised 346: 340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims and 12 Hindus—all British subjects. This was one of several incidents in the history of the early 20th century involving exclusion laws in both Canada and the United States designed to keep out immigrants of only Asian origin.

Of course, the PC caucus supports raising public awareness of historical wrongs, not just the Komagata Maru and the Japanese internment camps, but the MS St. Louis ship as well as many, many others.

I just want to mention, in case people are listening and aren't aware, that the attack on Pearl Harbor is what

spurred the government to intern ethnic Japanese living in Canada under the Defence of Canada Regulations and part of the War Measures Act. Canada has since apologized, as we know. The MS St. Louis was a German ocean liner most notable for a single voyage in 1939 when its captain tried to find homes for 908 Jewish refugees from Germany. After they were denied entry to Cuba, Canada, and the United States, the refugees were finally accepted in various European countries. Historians have estimated that approximately a quarter of them died in the death camps during World War II.

These apologies are crucial in ensuring that we as a society learn from history and avoid repeating these mistakes. On August 3, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper appeared at the 13th annual Gadri Babian da Mela festival in Surrey, BC, to issue an apology for the Komagata Maru incident on behalf of the government of Canada. He said, in response to the House of Commons motion calling for an apology by the government, "On behalf of the government of Canada, I am officially conveying as Prime Minister that apology."

Some members of the Sikh community were unsatisfied with the apology, as they expected it to be made in Parliament, which Prime Minister Trudeau will now be doing. Harper's apology was made part of the official record of the House of Commons by Canada's first turban-wearing Sikh minister, Tim Uppal, under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who should be congratulated for that.

The Conservative government funded the creation of the Komagata Maru museum as well as a travelling exhibit. They also included the Komagata Maru in the Canadian Museum of Immigration in Halifax and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. The Conservatives funded a monument at the Vancouver harbour and invested \$5 million in commemorative and educational projects about the Komagata Maru. The Conservatives ensured that the citizenship study guide now includes the Komagata Maru and issued an official Komagata Maru commemorative stamp for the centenary.

The Liberals have nothing on record up till now that even acknowledges this incident. I'm just reading all these out, which I really wasn't planning to, in my original notes, except that the member who presented this motion, the member from Brampton West, gave us a great historical account and then turned it into a partisan issue, which is very unfortunate, especially since it was the Conservatives who have done so much to raise awareness of this issue.

Obviously a lot more can be done to teach people about Canada's history, even the tough-to-hear Canadian history. Today we had a wonderful reception with the Vietnamese community, and many of us still have scarves here to commemorate Journey to Freedom Day. We tasted some of their food and we got to meet many members of the community. They were here to listen to statements from both sides of the House on it. We all know that they were referred to as "boat people" because

so many of the Vietnamese who fled Vietnam after the Vietnam War came by boat. There isn't enough time this afternoon; unfortunately, it's too long a list to talk about so many incidents.

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What I want to say is, I myself felt very uncomfortable and it was one the reasons why I left Montreal because of Bill 101 in Quebec, which I felt was discriminatory against anglophone rights. I think it's a very unfortunate footnote in Canadian history that anglophones felt so uncomfortable and left Quebec, but I think that the Ontario Legislature benefits from so many—I call them “anglophone refugees”—who came predominantly from Montreal and many of them are residing in my riding of Thornhill.

We also have to look to the future, Madam Speaker, and we have to think about what is going on now that we could ensure does not cause us to have to give restitution or supply apologies in the future—for wrongdoings that may be going on on Canadian soil, or maybe things on other soil that we're not doing enough to prevent.

One that came to my mind—I hate to even say it; it's Thursday afternoon before we have the Jewish holiday of Passover tomorrow, we have Coptic Easter coming up and I think there's a Baha'i holiday this week. Everyone's looking forward to celebrating, and I feel bad when I bring up uncomfortable subjects. But are we doing enough to ensure that young girls in Canada aren't being taken overseas to have genital mutilation performed on them? Will they be coming back to us to say, “You did not take away my passport. You did not educate my parents. You did not question where I was going.” Doctors are not forced to report when this is done, as far as I know, in many jurisdictions. Is it even a crime in our province? These are things that we need to look at. We have to protect the young girls of the future in Canada.

We just spoke about a motion about sexual harassment in the workplace. Well, let's do more to ensure and be proactive so that we're not coming back and apologizing for wrongdoings in future.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to add my voice on behalf of my riding of Essex to those of other elected officials from all political spectrums who now, after more than 100 years, finally offer our apologies to the passengers of the Komagata Maru, their families and their descendants.

This moment is long overdue, and while the incident will leave a black mark on the history of our country, the importance of recognizing this historic wrong is critical to reminding us that Canada must remain a place of hope, open to those in the world who suffer in the crossfire of war, from grinding poverty and oppressive political persecution, regardless of their religion, their colour or the country from which they come.

I am particularly proud that here at Queen's Park we are talking about making amends for our mistakes in not welcoming the passengers of the Komagata Maru at a

time when communities across our province are opening their hearts and receiving refugees from war-ravaged Syria. It's not just important to say the words, “I'm sorry”; it is equally important that we follow up those words with a renewed commitment to those values which make our country such a beacon to oppressed people across the globe and those seeking opportunity to make a better life for themselves and their families.

The parallels between what happened in Vancouver with the Komagata Maru and what we are seeing play out in the United States presidential election are poignant and significant: Donald Trump calling for a ban on Muslims entering the US or building a wall on the southern border is the same mentality which saw Canada refuse entry to British subjects who also happened to be Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus at a time when immigrants from white Europe were streaming into Canada in numbers not surpassed since.

When I think about all the great things Canadians have achieved, I can't help but think that, with the exception of indigenous peoples, all those achievements were made by immigrants or descendants of immigrants. I also can't help but think about the contributions to Canada that may have been lost because the Komagata Maru was rejected and sent back out to sea by the government of the day.

Selective immigration based on race, creed or culture is not a Canadian value. It doesn't make our country stronger; in fact, it makes our country weaker. Let us all, in this Legislature, today offer a full and unreserved apology for the Komagata Maru incident and recommit ourselves to building a fairer, more inclusive, diverse and open Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade.

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you for the opportunity. One hundred and two years ago, in 1914, there was a dark moment in Canada—a moment that failed human rights, a moment that failed humanity and a moment that desecrated the good name of Canada. I'm referring to the motion introduced by my colleague MPP Vic Dhillon from Brampton West. The experience of Sikhs in Canada, like many other immigrants, is littered with prejudice, discrimination and hostility. Unfortunately, this treatment and way of thinking was reinforced through immigration policies over time.

Immigration policies have been used to discourage certain groups of people from making Canada their home. The Asian community, in addition to many others, has faced a number of difficult challenges. The Continuous Passage Act required all immigrants to arrive on an uninterrupted journey from their port of origin to Canada. This was especially difficult for immigrants from Asia, because no steamship line provided continuous service from Asia to Canada.

Additional legislation required immigrants from Asia who wished to enter Canada to have \$200 in their hands upon arrival. That was a lot of money in those times, and those who chose to immigrate to Canada did not have the

means to bring that kind of money with them. Let's not forget about the Chinese Immigration Act, which put a head tax on Chinese immigrants.

It is important for our government to acknowledge the wrong committed against immigrant communities and to work toward creating legislation that will make it impossible for such prejudice and discriminatory ways of thinking from impacting the lives of old and new Canadians, now and in the future.

I speak to support the motion brought forward to support the federal government's decision to offer a full apology for this incident, and also call upon future governments to never again enact discriminatory immigration laws based on one's religion, ethnicity, gender or race.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise in support of the motion brought forward by my colleague Mr. Dhillon. He made a presentation about the historic facts, and I commend him for bringing this forward to the assembly. My colleague from Thornhill, as well, spoke in support of the motion here today.

There's no doubt that the Komagata Maru was an extraordinary tragedy, and it's important for us in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize that for what it was. The passengers arrived in Canadian waters on May 21, 1914. They were anchored in Vancouver's harbour. Not a single one of the passengers was allowed ashore, even for a preliminary examination, except for 20 returning residents and a very few special cases. The vast majority found themselves confined in the ship, like prisoners, throughout their entire time in the Canadian waters.

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The journey to get there was devastating as well. Initially, 355 disappointed, radicalized passengers left for Asia. After a long delay in Japan where some passengers disembarked, 321 passengers reached the Indian port of Budge Budge near Kolkata, on the September 29, 1914. Of course, by then, the First World War had begun.

Passengers on board had hoped that they would find freedom and safety in our country—which we take for granted and have always enjoyed. It's a shameful part of our history that, because of their religion, their race and their country of origin, they were treated in this fashion. It's unconscionable to us in 2016, but, sadly, it was the reality of the decision Canadians made in 1914. Even though some folks may say that's 102 years ago, I do think it is very important for us to send the right signal today, the apology, and to put the historical facts on the record—and our collective shame, I think, from all three parties. So I commend the member from Brampton West for doing this.

It reminds me of the sad reality of the MS St. Louis as well, with German Jewish people who were turned away. The 907 Jewish refugees aboard the St. Louis were denied entry to Canada. They were fleeing Nazi Germany, but the decision-makers at the time sent them back

to Europe. Tragically, 254 of those original passengers were killed in the Holocaust—wiped out, eradicated. I can only imagine, if people had been more thoughtful in 1939, the contributions and the vitality that would have created our nation. It's shameful that decision-makers at that point in time not only said “no,” but had this attitude that “none is too many.” It was the same with the Komagata Maru.

I know, in Parliament, that Prime Minister Harper's apology was made part of the official record in the House of Commons by Canada's first turban-wearing Sikh minister, Tim Uppal. The Conservative government funded the creation of the Komagata Maru Museum, as well as a travelling exhibit—because I bet a lot of Canadians, even those gathered here today for this solemn debate, really wouldn't know much about this. Thankfully, it's before the assembly today, so we do. This includes the Komagata Maru in the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The government of the day and Prime Minister Harper funded a monument at the Vancouver Harbour and invested \$5 million in commemorative and educational projects about the Komagata Maru. The citizen guide at the time also recognized it. I understand Prime Minister Trudeau is making a formal apology as well.

I think it's important we recognize this goes beyond partisan politics and that all of us, as Canadians, are truly sorry and apologize to the Sikh people and the families affected by this tragedy.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: First of all, I want to say that I wholeheartedly agree with the motion put forward by my colleague from Brampton West.

As you have heard, Sikhs were returned from the shores of Vancouver, BC, in 1914, due to the unfair and discriminatory immigration practices that existed at that time. Today, however, I want to talk about how the times have changed and about how the descendants of the same Sikhs are making incredible contributions to Canadian society 100 years later.

It is ironic that in the same province, 76 years later, in 1986, Mr. Munmohan Singh Sihota became the first Sikh to be elected to the British Columbia legislature and later on became the first Sikh to join the BC cabinet as a minister and held very important portfolios, including education, environment, labour and human rights.

In the same province, Mr. Ujjal Dosanjh, another Sikh, served as the Attorney General of that province and, later on, in 1999, became the Premier of the province of British Columbia.

Mr. Herb Dhaliwal, another Sikh from the same province, became the first Sikh ever to be appointed to the federal cabinet in Canada.

All these leaders were pioneers and paved the way for further significant political appointments. Recently, the Honourable Harjit Singh Sajjan was appointed as the minister of defence in Prime Minister Trudeau's cabinet.

The British Columbia Sikhs have come a long way from the days of the Komagata Maru and now are considered an integral and important part of British Columbia's fabric and are making great contributions to the well-being of the province.

Madam Speaker, as I have said so many times, the Sikhs in Ontario have done really well. Right here in the Legislature, we have five members of Sikh heritage. I had the honour to serve as the first Sikh in the Ontario cabinet. We now have two Sikh cabinet ministers in the federal cabinet, holding very important economic portfolios.

The presence of Sikhs can be felt in every aspect of our society. The Sikhs, by nature, are entrepreneurs, and they have made a very strong contribution to our provincial economy.

Madam Speaker, Komagata Maru was an unfortunate incident. Our province and our country is richer because of the diversity of our population. I'm very proud of the contribution that the Sikhs have made to the culture and economic fabric of our society.

The Komagata Maru was forgotten by Canadians at some point, but since then, I think that Sikhs have been insisting that the apology should be offered right in the House of Commons. I'm very glad that our Prime Minister has decided to do just that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I rise today to support the motion put forward by my colleague from Brampton West.

The Komagata Maru incident is a dark stain on the face of the value of tolerance and inclusiveness. When I immigrated to Canada from India, I first lived in Vancouver and I had the opportunity to visit Coal Harbour, where I was told the Komagata Maru had been anchored. While there, in my mind, I could see the faces of the 376 passengers who endured the most deplorable, prison-like conditions for two months. They were denied entry to Canada because of a deliberate and exclusionary policy of our federal government of the day. They wanted to keep out people of certain ethnicities—innocent Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims from India—who arrived with hope in their eyes and a dream of a better life for their families in their hearts.

This ill-fated ship was escorted out of Canadian waters by the military and forced to return to India. When the ship arrived at Budge Budge harbour in Calcutta, British soldiers shot at those innocent, tired and desperate migrants, killing 19 and imprisoning most of them. Madam Speaker, what a punishment for harbouring hope and for seeking a better future for their families. We cannot bring back those who lost their lives in this tragedy. We also cannot heal the pain and suffering of those who lost their loved ones.

Our Canada today prides itself on being a tolerant and inclusive society. Therefore, we should not hesitate to accept responsibility for historic wrongs and unfortunate actions of our government of the day.

Madam Speaker, the announcement of an apology for the Komagata Maru tragedy by our Prime Minister, the

Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, in the House of Commons on May 18, 2016, is the only right thing to do.

1520

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: First, I want to begin by saying that I think it's absolutely appropriate that an apology is being delivered by the Prime Minister of our country. I think that's a very positive thing, and I think that it's important to commit to apologizing for wrongdoings that happened in the past. I think that's the appropriate thing for any Prime Minister to do, so I acknowledge that, and I acknowledge a commitment to ensuring that, moving forward, we don't repeat these types of policies, which are regressive, which are racist, which are exclusionary. That's an important commitment.

With respect to the motion, those elements of the motion are positive things and I want to acknowledge that. But there are some very key things we have to address when it comes to the language being used. One of the things that's being brought up time and time again is that this was an unfortunate incident. I want to challenge that notion. This wasn't an "unfortunate incident." It was, and continues to be, part of a systemic problem. It wasn't a one-off situation.

In fact, the Minister of Immigration raised some of the issues here in Ontario. Across Canada there was systemic racism with respect to immigration policies. This wasn't one incident that targeted a group of people. This was a snapshot of a broader problem, starting in 1900, with the head tax on Chinese immigrants; then 1903, when that head tax was increased; and looking forward to 1910, when the Immigration Act's section 38 very clearly stated that the government was able to prohibit the landing of immigrants "belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada, or of immigrants of any specified class, occupation or character."

This was a systemic issue. This was not an incident in the history of Canada; this was a broad problem of racism that existed very clearly. When we refer to it as an unfortunate incident—"Oh, this was one bad problem that happened, one bad specific moment in time"—it actually does an injustice to the reality of a systemic history of oppression of racialized people in this country that has happened. We need to acknowledge it as a systemic issue, not as a one-off incident. That's important.

The War Measures Act was passed, which gave government wide powers to arrest and to detain. In 1917—this is important—the Wartime Elections Act disenfranchised all people from "enemy-alien" countries who had been naturalized since 1902. That is a systemic approach. That is a government approach. That is not a one-off incident where one boat was landing. This is a systemic issue that's going on here.

In June 1919, Doukhobors, Mennonites and Hutterites were prohibited entry because of their "peculiar habits, modes of life and methods of holding property." Again, it was a systemic approach to another marginalized community.

Our colleague from the Conservative Party addressed the St. Louis incident. In 1939, the St. Louis sailed from Germany with 930 Jewish refugees on board. No country in the Americas allowed them to land. The ship was forced to return to Europe, where three quarters of the refugees died at the hands of the Nazis. Again, it was a systemic approach to racist policies when it comes to dealing with people from other countries coming to Canada, not a one-off incident. We need to address it like that.

I am very proud, of course, of my Sikh heritage, but this incident impacted not only Sikhs. There were 340 Sikhs on board, but there were 24 Muslims and there were 12 Hindus. This was an issue of racism that was perpetuated against people of South Asian descent. It was not specifically targeted towards the Sikhs; it was targeted towards South Asians, broadly speaking.

We need to speak about that as well. This is an issue that impacted South Asians. They were treated unfairly. These were folks who were a part of the British Empire, but they were not treated fairly. The continuous journey was not a one-off incident; it was a policy in place which specifically targeted people who came from farther away. The continuous journey law did not apply to folks coming from the United Kingdom, because they could come directly. That was not chance, that was not a coincidence; that was a specific, targeted, racist policy, and that's why we need to speak about it that way.

When we talk about ensuring that these wrongs don't occur in the future, what should we do? What happens when we have an apology that's limited to just looking at a specific incident from the past is that it relegates the issue to being a one-off incident, and we relegate the issue to being a historical problem. Well, there's problems today.

It's important to apologize for issues that happened in the past, but how can we really commit to ensuring that we have a country that's committed to social justice? Well, we can do a couple of things. We can talk about some of the systemic problems that exist. What are those problems for new Canadians? The fact that there are so many talented, skilled people coming to this country who don't have the opportunity to use their expertise and their skills in this country because they're not acknowledged—their skills, their training. Internationally trained individuals who come to Canada to make it their home are not able to actually use their skills to contribute back to the country because we don't have a process that allows them to get accredited in terms of their skills. That's something we can commit to. The province can commit to a process to ensuring that people can become accredited in an easy, accessible and affordable manner.

What else can we do? We can ensure that we increase funding to new Canadians coming so that they can have language resources, that they can have educational opportunities, that they can actually become successful in the country.

We have a past decade of cuts to refugee health care, refugee services, and if we really want to be committed

to ensuring that our country redresses the wrongs from the past and looks at the systemic issues, then we should be committed to ensuring that we increase funding for those services, that people who come here—and we welcome them—are also provided with resources to succeed, provided with language opportunities, provided with health care opportunities. These are the issues we need to address.

Another component: If we really want to talk about apologizing for racist policies from the past, let's look at current policies that are going to impact people. Right now, we have in this land Bill C-51, which is the law of the land. We should have a motion which says that the federal government should repeal that, not amend it. It's a law that was criticized by previous Prime Ministers, a law that was criticized by previous Supreme Court judges, a law that was criticized by artists, journalists and by a wide range of civil society. That's a law that's currently in existence in this land.

There are a number of individuals who have come forward and said that not only does this disproportionately impact racialized people, people from different ethnic backgrounds, it disproportionately impacts natives, aboriginals. This is a law, which is currently a law in this land, which is going to, and does, systemically target certain people based on their religious beliefs and the colour of their skin. That's a policy we need to have immediately repealed. That's a law that we need to see immediately repealed. That would be a meaningful way to do justice to those who were wronged in the past. That is something we can do today.

In addition, we have ongoing issues of discriminatory policing practices, like carding. That's an issue today that impacts new Canadians. The current regulations that have been presented by this government do not actually end this practice. They provide a huge loophole which, in effect, renders the entire regulation meaningless. It does not actually provide protection to people who are from racialized backgrounds, people who are being targeted just because of the colour of their skin—not because they are the subject of a particular investigation, not because there's any evidence against them, but simply because of the colour of their skin. That's exactly what happened to people on the Komagata Maru ship.

If we want to do justice to the injustices of the past, we need to address them in a systemic fashion and address the wrongdoings that are going on right now in our country. That's the way you really pay homage to the injustices: by ensuring that those that are happening in the present are rectified and ensuring that they don't happen again in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Brampton–Springdale.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I rise today to support the decision of the federal government to apologize for the Komagata Maru incident in 1914.

Coming from a Sikh family, this is a proud moment for us as Sikh Canadians. I know Vic mentioned earlier that my father was the first turbaned Sikh elected as a

member of Parliament in Canada. It was a proud moment for us all. But as a child, I also saw the struggles he faced and the barriers he had to overcome so that we could be here today, we could be in a position of power. I remember when he first went to our local Legion and he wasn't allowed to enter the Legion with his turban because they didn't allow headgear. It was a barrier that he had to cross. It was racism that he had to overcome.

Last week, when the Prime Minister celebrated Vaisakhi on the Hill, he talked about an experience he once had while he was standing at the Centennial Flame, where somebody came up and asked him where his taxi was. Instead of saying anything else, he responded politely, "I'm not driving today"—because 20 years ago, in 1993, Sikhs were still known as being taxi drivers.

1530

I completely agree with the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton that we need to recognize foreign credentials, but we also need to recognize incidents of the past and apologize. We need to apologize, as a nation, for the intolerance suffered by the Sikh community in 1914—not only for the Sikh community, but for the South Asian community as a whole—at the hands of the Canadian government of the day. The passengers, all British subjects, were challenging the continuous-passage regulation, which stated that immigrants must “come from the country of their birth, or citizenship, by a continuous journey and on through tickets purchased before leaving the country of their birth, or citizenship.”

The events surrounding the Komagata Maru had not been acknowledged in Canadian history until beyond the 1970s. I understand that Prime Minister Harper did recognize them. Prime Minister Trudeau is recognizing them in the House of Commons, and it's a proud moment for us all. Prime Minister Trudeau has acted on it. Sikhs have become an important part of the political fabric of Canada. He has four Sikh cabinet ministers. I think he made a joke by saying that he has more Sikh cabinet ministers than they do today in India. So he has recognized and acknowledged and he has moved forward on that and delivered for the Sikh community. We're proud to say that today he will be apologizing for the Komagata Maru incident. The apology is not only for the families of all the passengers, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, but for the millions of immigrants that now call Canada home.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Brampton West.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I want to begin by first thanking the members who spoke on this motion: the members from Thornhill and Essex; the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade; and the members from Niagara West–Glanbrook, Mississauga–Erindale, Mississauga–Brampton South, Bramalea–Gore–Malton and Brampton–Springdale.

Madam Speaker, I think we can all agree that the Komagata Maru incident was a very dark time in Canadian history. As the member from Essex stated, a formal, full apology in the House of Commons is long overdue. It's truly a time for righting a wrong. This apology by

Prime Minister Trudeau will be heard loudly across the world as a message of our Canadian values, as a caring, compassionate and inclusive society.

As a Canadian who happens to be Sikh and a member of the government under Premier Kathleen Wynne's leadership, I'm very proud to say that we support the Prime Minister in his upcoming apology in the House of Commons.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government should put an immediate and permanent stop to the wpd wind turbine project next to the Collingwood Regional Airport; in the name of pilot safety and public safety, as well as protecting economic development and jobs.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Wilson has moved private member's notice of motion number 67. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to start off by thanking all of the constituents who have come down from the riding today, taking the time to come down for such an important issue and to watch. Frankly, it's a majority government, so it doesn't really matter how many there are on this side of the House or how we vote, it's how the people on that side of the House vote—because they'll outvote us on every occasion. So 50 minutes from now, we'll be watching very, very carefully.

Madam Speaker, my private member's resolution calls on the government to put an immediate and permanent stop to the wpd wind turbine project next to the Collingwood Regional Airport and the Stayner Aerodrome. The people of my riding don't want the wpd turbines. They don't want them because they threaten pilot safety. They don't want them because they threaten public safety. They also don't want them because of what they mean to human health.

We've all read reports about people living near wind turbines and stories about how residents are plagued by dizziness and ringing in the ears and flickering. My constituents don't want to deal with these issues in the years to come. Another reason my constituents don't want the turbines is, they will hinder economic development and job creation.

Now, all of these reasons are pretty straightforward. I understand them. Most people I talk to understand them. They are positions the community has put forward since this project first became public knowledge back in 2010. Sadly, at each step it seems these views haven't been heard—or maybe a better term is that they haven't been valued—because it seems we have a government that is so set on allowing these turbines to happen that it doesn't care one iota about the views of the people of Simcoe–Grey.

Let us for a moment, Madam Speaker, look at the sheer height of these turbines. wpd wants to erect eight 500-foot turbines—that's 152 metres—next to the

Collingwood airport and near the Stayner airport. Two of the turbines will be 2.1 nautical miles from the airport—that's about 2.5 regular miles—and they're as tall as a 50-storey office building here in downtown Toronto. There's nothing like them in my riding or in Canada. It's ludicrous. Simply put, it's the strangest plan I have ever heard of in my 25 years at Queen's Park.

Planes landing and taking off at the airport will be just seconds away from colliding with these structures. We all remember that on April 27, 2014, a Piper aircraft was destroyed when it collided with the blade of a wind turbine near the Highmore Municipal Airport in South Dakota. Four men died in that crash. These tragedies can happen, Madam Speaker.

Let's take a moment to look at how busy the Collingwood airport is. It's extremely busy for a regional airport. On average, the airport experiences more than 11,000 landings and takeoffs each year. These are business people using the airport; these are recreational flyers and student pilots; these are tourists coming into the area; these are government flights. That number, Madam Speaker, that more than 11,000 landings and takeoffs each year, is expected to grow. It's imperative that nothing put this facility at risk.

The township of Clearview and the town of Collingwood stated they don't believe the turbines should be placed next to the airport because of the negative economic impact these structures will have on the airport and neighbouring lands. They backed this position with a study they commissioned. The study notes that the airport and related businesses directly employ 30 people and support another 20 indirect jobs, and that these generate annual totals of \$2.8 million in labour income and \$3 million in GDP—not big numbers for Toronto but big numbers for Simcoe–Grey.

Let me say, Madam Speaker, that I've sat awake at night trying to figure out why the government is allowing these turbines in the riding. The environment minister likes to say that Nav Canada doesn't have any concerns about these turbines, but the pilots using the Collingwood airport certainly do. They don't take the matter lightly, and neither should the Liberals. Nav Canada told me a year and a half ago that they don't have any rules for this sort of situation because they didn't think any government would be stupid enough to build 500-foot-high wind turbines next to an airport.

The Collingwood airport is a registered aerodrome and not a Transport Canada-certified airport. Therefore, its operational airspace is not protected by Transport Canada. That means Transport Canada will not interfere with the province's decision to approve the placement of wind turbines within the operational airspace of the airport. Hence, flight risks—mainly wind turbines next to the airport—have not been reviewed or assessed by Transport Canada or Nav Canada, as they have no authority to act. So, Madam Speaker, it's disingenuous when the government states that Transport Canada and Nav Canada have no concerns.

On top of all of this, Clearview township, the municipality of which the—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Simcoe–Grey, you need to withdraw that statement.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Withdraw.

On top of all this, Clearview township, the local municipality where the turbines will be located, has stated that it's not a willing host to the turbines.

And as you know, Madam Speaker, I want to point out that the government was wrong to strip municipalities of planning authority in regard to wind turbines and renewable energy projects under the Green Energy Act. They are the only government in Canada to do so. Municipalities have so many land planning powers. Removing their authority over the placement of wind turbines is opportunistic on the part of the Liberal government here at Queen's Park.

For residents in my riding, this whole issue has been incredibly frustrating. On numerous occasions, in writing and through demonstrations in the riding and here at Queen's Park, residents have said they don't want these turbines. But the government ignores them.

Well, Madam Speaker, people don't like to be ignored. By not listening to the people of my riding, the government is showing its arrogance. People remember that type of treatment; they remember it for years to come. I quite frankly find it a puzzling way to treat residents of this province.

1540

For many people living near the airport, their concerns tie into quality of life. They believe their quality of life will be negatively impacted if these turbines are built, and I agree with them. Think about it for a moment: Would you want to live right next to one of these mammoth structures?

Then there's the whole issue of property values. These properties near the airport, near the site where the turbines will be built, are beautiful rural parcels. There are gorgeous views of the Niagara Escarpment and Wasaga Beach. These properties are valuable pieces of land. The owners have worked hard for many years to afford where they live today. Now those turbines are going in. The property owners are worried about what that will mean to the value of their land, and so they should be. The turbines will also diminish the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the area, which is in close proximity to the Niagara Escarpment, a UNESCO world biosphere reserve.

I want to share some of the comments from people in my riding. Mr. Kevin Elwood, who was with us here today, is a business owner in the riding and he's a local pilot. He has his own airfield near the turbines. He's also a municipal councillor. Mr. Elwood said, when the government approved the wpd project, "[I] agree this is not good news. The province has knowingly approved a project that will have long-lasting negative economic impacts along with risks to human health...." He went on to say, "With a province as large as Ontario, it is inconceivable that there is a need to shoehorn eight wind turbines tight beside two aerodromes...."

Now I must quote the many pilots using Collingwood Regional Airport. I must note that many of the pilots

using the airport do so without high-tech instrumentation. They make visual landings. Can you imagine approaching the airport in heavy rain or when the snow is blowing and having to avoid these turbines?

The Liberals like to hide behind their Green Energy Act when talking about wind turbines. The fact is that that piece of legislation, in this regard, is terribly flawed. I say so because no well-thought-out legislation would ever permit wind turbines anywhere near an airport. It's simply preposterous that this project was even considered, let alone approved.

Despite the tough road that has led us here today, Madam Speaker, I am more proud of my constituents than ever before. They are tenacious when it comes to something they believe in. Mr. Jeffrey Shearer, publisher of *On The Bay Magazine*, states, "But local residents have not given up. Six legal appeals have been lodged against the Liberal government's decision, based on a number of environmental and aviation issues. Private citizens' groups have filed three of the appeals, while the municipalities of Collingwood, Clearview and Simcoe county are behind the other three."

Clearview resident Betty Schneider has a petition on change.org to try to stop the turbine project from happening. Each day, it gets more signatures.

The government has a chance here to do the right thing. We know this project is wrong. We just need someone in the government to admit it. Now, Mr. Speaker—Madam Speaker, there's nothing wrong with the government saying it made a mistake. In fact, admitting when we are wrong shows great maturity and fortitude. It's my hope today—it's our hope today—that the government will take that step, that it will use this opportunity to stand before the people in the gallery of this House, those at home, those across Ontario and, frankly, pilots around North America: Admit, "We were wrong. We didn't get this right. We're going to put a stop to this madness." Imagine, Madam Speaker, the goodwill that would create. Imagine how this government would be remembered in the south Georgian Bay area in the years to come.

As it stands right now, things do look bleak. In the words of Clearview township mayor Chris Vanderkruys, "We are extremely disappointed that the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change has granted wind Canada a renewable energy approval for the Fairview Wind Project." We are all very, very disappointed. While we're disappointed too, Mr. Speaker—Madam Speaker. You're new at the job, so I'm getting used to it; congratulations—we're all hopeful over here. You can do the right thing.

I just want to tell you the position of the airport authority, the board that runs the airport. They've had the position that they didn't want to get caught up in the Green Energy Act and they didn't want to get caught up on whether wind is good or bad. Their official position has been since 2010, before the Green Energy Act, just move the turbines. Just move them. Why do you have to put them between two very busy airports, where they're not wanted?

I want to end with this: People ask me, "Why are they so big?" We don't have that much wind up there. Why are they so big? It's because you get paid for installed capacity, whether they ever work or not—millions of dollars to be made on these things, whether they ever go around or not—and that's a real shame.

You have the chance to do the right thing. I ask the honourable members that are here today—and I appreciate you being here—to do just that: Send a message to your own government that this just isn't right. You don't want the blood of civilians and pilots on your hands. It's not a matter of if someone's going to get hurt or if there's going to be an accident. It's a matter of when there's going to be an accident and when there's going to be a death.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to rise. I have to say that the member for Simcoe–Grey is a very capable speaker, a capable debater, so I don't generally relish disagreeing with him. But in this case—and I'm sure he will not be surprised—I do disagree with him.

I wanted to look at his arguments, because I had an opportunity to hear them when he presented them earlier today in the media studio, and he reprised them largely in his presentation this afternoon.

The first has to do with protection of pilot and public safety. I see those as worthy goals. I think that anyone who has any development in the area of an airport has to think about those matters, and frankly, any airport administration should be taking those into consideration. Any process for reviewing a development has to take those into consideration.

I had an opportunity, when I heard about this motion coming forward, to take a look at the document that was provided by Nav Canada when they were asked to comment on this proposal.

They sent a letter March 15, 2016, and I will read what they have to say. This is in response to the developer. I said, "Ok, you've got this proposal coming forward. This is opposed. Show me what your documentation is." This is the letter, March 15, 2016, from Nav Canada. They state, "We have evaluated the captioned proposal"—the eight wind turbines at Stayner, Ontario—"and Nav Canada has no objection to the project as submitted. Be advised that the locations and heights of the proposed turbines will require the following publication amendments to the procedures for Collingwood airport...."

In fact, Nav Canada will say to you, if you're building near an airport, "If you change the topography, you have to give us notice so that we can inform pilots, so that we can put it out for the public." Anyone who's planning a flight path, who's coming into this area, has to know what is there.

The Nav Canada letter goes on to say that "impacts can be limited by sectoring the circling" for planes to north of this particular area. In fact, you can't circle to

the south. Yes, then you would come into conflict with those wind turbines. But if you go to the north, that's a perfectly reasonable accommodation.

I have to note, and I'll talk further about it as I go on, about Billy Bishop that planes that circle Billy Bishop don't come north of the airport to circle through the financial district. They go south to circle over Lake Ontario. It's entirely reasonable for an airport in a constrained area to have rules and regulations that tell pilots where they can safely circle and where they should not be going.

"Nav Canada's evaluation and conclusions are based only on the impacts to procedures we maintain; therefore, we do not object to the proposal as submitted provided our construction notification requirements ... are met.

"With respect to impacts to instrument procedures maintained by external organizations, we encourage you to consult directly with all affected aerodromes and external instrument procedure design organizations. As procedures to Stayner (Clearview Field) Airport ... are also impacted by the project we recommend you contact the design firm for those procedures to discuss mitigations."

In other words, they're saying, "If you're going forward with this, in our books, this works. There are design features, there are matters to do with instrument flight, that you need to be looking at mitigation for." They don't say anywhere that this airport and this development should not coexist. They're saying there have to be adjustments so that they can coexist.

1550

I have to say that the member, in his very thorough presentation, referred to the question of jobs. I'm assuming—and he may correct me when he speaks later—he's talking about the proposed Clearview Aviation Business Park. I took the opportunity to read the Enterprise Bulletin's recent report from February 11, 2016—commentary on the aviation business park. The Enterprise Bulletin reported:

"The Fairview project will be built on land owned by farmers John and Andrew Beattie." For those not familiar, the Fairview project is the windmill project that's in question here today.

"In a statement sent to local officials and media Thursday afternoon, they"—the farmers John and Andrew Beattie—"wrote that airport industrial growth should go to the business park located near the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport in Oro-Medonte township, north of Barrie, rather than take up agricultural land adjacent to the Collingwood airport.

"Land zoned agricultural and environmental will have to be rezoned and an official plan amendment would have to be passed by the county of Simcoe; the county, in following the growth plan for the greater horseshoe within the Places to Grow Act, will find that the business park plans don't fit within those policies, they wrote."

Now, I haven't read the official plan for this area and I haven't gone through Places to Grow on everything to do with Simcoe county, but it strikes me that these farmers,

business people, who are supporting this project, are pointing out that there are substantial zoning problems with this aviation industrial park. What we seem to have here is a conflict between two businesses. The question is, what's the way to find the right ground, the middle ground, between those businesses?

In fact, the business that's proposed, the aviation industrial park, will encroach on and eliminate agricultural land. It was my understanding around this chamber, in this Legislature, that there's great support for protection of agricultural land. If, in fact, there is already zoned industrial park property near another airport within the same region, it makes sense to develop there rather than go to what is already a greenfield—productive agricultural land in a country that doesn't have enough of it—and convert to it industrial.

They say, "In fact, we have been told that such a zoning application would be dead in the water and could not stand up to an Ontario Municipal Board appeal if for some reason Simcoe approved it," read the statement.

"The growth plan aims to, among other things, protect farmland. The previous council was on record as supporting agriculture, but it's unclear to us how the present council's intention to remove (89 hectares) of agricultural land achieves this," they added in the statement."

Again, it seems to me that what we have are two different business models, two different business views, on how local land use should be carried forward. We've got the farmers who are saying, "We want to have these windmills on our property. We want them to generate revenue. We think that this industrial park or this business park around the airport is going to have substantial zoning problems and may not even go forward at all." I would say that protecting agricultural land and having green energy—clean energy—makes a lot of sense.

I just want to note, as well, that there are competing interests in terms of this land. That's something that, frankly, should be sorted out by those who have the jurisdiction to decide on zoning. I don't think that politicizing the process, ignoring technical bodies who are going to be assessing that and bringing it to this chamber—I'm not sure that that's something that the opposition wants to do. I think if every planning decision came to this body, we would have very profound problems. If this body decided that protection of agricultural land was not something that it wanted to do, again, I think there would be great difficulties in this chamber.

There are a few larger issues here. One is, does Ontario need to develop renewable power? I don't think there's any question. If you look at what we're facing in terms of climate change and the impact it will have on society, the need to move very quickly, very ambitiously, to transform away from a fossil-fuel-powered energy system is imperative.

The other side of it, frankly, is that there are trillions of dollars' worth of energy development on the table over the next few decades. Those jurisdictions that have the expertise, the history and the ability to develop green power have a tremendous opportunity.

People need to remember that the development of hydro power in Ontario wasn't just something that benefited the local economies in southwestern Ontario—and “benefited” is greatly understating it. In fact, we developed a generation of entrepreneurs, engineers and planners who went around the world developing water power. We became a powerhouse for knowledge and energy development, not just a powerhouse for clean energy here in southern Ontario. For us to be backing off the development of clean energy when it's not supported through a reasonable assessment of the facts doesn't make sense to me.

I understand that the opposition has taken this position on renewable energy on a consistent basis. I disagree with them. I think that they have made an incorrect read of where the economy is going, and for a party that prides itself on being a party of business, I find that confusing at best.

I have to say this about the government party, and I'm not speaking about them in a laudatory way: I think they've made a huge mistake in not having the public sector and the community sector dramatically expand renewable energy in this province. I think there would have been far greater acceptance. I made these arguments when we were going through clause-by-clause on the Green Energy Act: that if you looked at what happened in Europe—in Denmark and Germany and other countries—where you have local support and local power co-ops, you have dramatically more support for the power itself, and where you have privately owned multinational firms muscling their way in, you have substantial problems. We would have benefited from a very different approach if the government had done that; unfortunately, they didn't.

The question before us is, do we follow a technical process for assessing a project that seems to actually accord with the facts on the ground or not? I think we need to do that.

Speaker, the member is a capable parliamentarian and a dynamite speaker. I always am reluctant to disagree with him, but on this, I must.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is a pleasure to pick up where my colleague from Toronto–Danforth left off. In fact, I must commend him for having made some of the points that I was wondering whether or not I could squeeze in. Like him, I have a great deal of respect for my colleague from Simcoe–Grey because I understand where he's coming from.

My colleague from Toronto–Danforth has made some points that I think are important: Should local zoning considerations and should planning decisions be made here on the floor of the Legislature? I don't think so; neither does he. He points out that NavCan did due diligence—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm been very tolerant of the opposition party and the noise. I

know this is a very heated discussion, and very colourful language will be used very shortly, I'm sure, so can we please tone it down? Respectfully, you don't have the floor; the member for Mississauga–Streetsville does. We return back to him.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I would point out that we listened very politely to what the member for Simcoe–Grey had to say, and I hope he will accord us the same courtesy.

Ontario's investment in renewable energy has been, in fact, a significant portion of the province's ability to end all coal-fired generation in 2014. This has been a key part for Ontario in being able to move toward meeting our portion of the climate change accord signed last December. As a consequence, by 2015 more than 90% of the power generated in Ontario had come from clean sources of energy, such as water, nuclear and non-hydro renewables.

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The province has made significant progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector, which included that exact phasing out of coal-fired electronic generation and shifting to clean, non-emitting sources. Ten years ago, Ontario relied on coal for nearly a quarter of its electrical energy. Ontario is now completely coal-free—something like taking seven million cars off Ontario's roads. It is the single largest, most successful climate change initiative in North America, saving an estimated \$4.5 billion per year in health, financial and environmental costs.

Secondly, as the member for Toronto–Danforth pointed out, Ontario's renewable program has grown into one of the fastest-growing clean-tech sectors in Canada. We have some 2,700 clean-tech firms that employ about 65,000 people in the clean technology sector, generating annual revenues of more than \$8 billion. To date, Ontario has more than 18,500 megawatts of renewable energy on-line or announced, which includes more than 9,000 megawatts of hydroelectric capacity and almost the same—9,500 megawatts—of solar, wind and bioenergy capacity.

The project we are discussing today is a contract awarded through the Feed-In Tariff program. The program rules are focused on the procurement of electricity from renewable energy projects. I'm sure the member opposite knows that it is the Independent Electricity System Operator, not the Legislature and not the Ministry of Energy, that is responsible for selecting the successful proponents for energy procurement. At the time this contract was awarded in 2010, it was the Ontario Power Authority, another independent agency, that held this role, and now this responsibility lies with the IESO since they plan the power system to meet Ontario's electricity needs, now and in the future.

It is therefore the IESO that is a party to the contract with the project developer and not the Ministry of Energy or the government of Ontario. I say to the member that this is an issue to be dealt with through the process already in place, and I'm sure the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change will speak to this later.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a great pleasure to speak to the member for Simcoe–Grey's private member's bill. I think Jim Wilson has probably written the book on how to advocate for his community. I certainly lean on him, when issues are coming up in Dufferin–Caledon, on how to bring them forward and get this government to finally do the right thing. I thank him for that.

I did a bit of research on airports in Ontario, because I fly in a small plane. I'm not a pilot, but I have the pleasure of having some good friends who are, so I understand that every landing isn't a perfect landing and every day isn't a perfect day to fly. We cannot have airports that have these limitations.

A very personal story: Last fall, a very close friend of mine had an emergency landing in his small plane. He almost died. He is just now recovering, six months later. He couldn't do that perfect landing we all like to think we can every time we see an airport. I hate to think we are facing another Dunnville Airport.

I just want to read very quickly: "As of May 30, 2013, all flight operations ceased at the" Dunnville "airport to make way for industrial wind turbines being built on that site."

What we are talking about is limiting the ability of this Collingwood airport to bring in economic providers that will make that community grow; that will make it a hub for our infrastructure in Ontario. That is directly related to infrastructure, to airports and flight operations.

Airports are the new railroads of Ontario. We have fly-in communities, where the only way people can get there is through flight. Why we would ever be thinking that it's a smart thing to limit an airport's ability to grow, to limit an airport's ability to serve its community, is beyond the pale.

As the member from Simcoe–Grey aptly said, it is never too late to do the right thing. Let's not have another Dunnville Airport.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: This is an issue I'm all too familiar with. Eight turbines were approved inside federally protected airport zoning regulations at the Chatham–Kent Municipal Airport. I've talked to numerous pilots who were concerned about their safety, especially in adverse weather conditions. These pilots themselves expressed that they could not understand how anyone could possibly think that this is a good idea.

When it comes to the issue of flying safely, I side with the pilots and their passengers. They're the ones whose lives are put at risk by dangerous decision-making on the part of this government. They're the ones who should be listened to. We don't want to see any body bags at our airports—including at the Collingwood airport.

The experts are the pilots who fly in and out of small airports under all kinds of weather conditions: snow, heavy rain, fog and strong winds. It's unfortunate that close calls or incidents are not recorded. May there never be an accident.

These are the experts, not the Liberal government sitting in offices making decisions from afar. I welcome the opportunity to take them up in a small aircraft to experience hair-raising takeoffs or landings.

Back to my riding: Transport Canada eventually ruled that the eight industrial wind turbines had to be removed. But after the turbine company launched an appeal, the federal government eventually backed down. The legal fight would be costly for the government, and these companies had deep pockets. The trouble with these cases is that once they're up, they're nearly impossible to remove. That's why we need to use some common sense and stop this reckless project before it goes forward.

One wonders how such a project could possibly be approved in the first place. Well, surprise, surprise, Speaker: The president of the turbine company that was allowed to build the turbines next to the Chatham airport was a former Liberal Party president, Mike Crawley. The insane decision to build the turbines around an airport inside federally protected zoning regulations was approved to help line the pockets of a Liberal Party president.

Here's what former NDP leader Howard Hampton had to say about the stench surrounding what he called "inside deals."

Speaker, I want to point something out. These are serious allegations, but I need to be very clear that these are direct quotes from Hansard.

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Are you suggesting I can't use direct quotes from Hansard?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to remind the member to be careful with your choice of words. We have already spoken about this before. I'm going to say again, you're going to have to withdraw your comments.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I withdraw.

The former MPP from Leeds–Grenville and former interim leader of the PC Party, Bob Runciman, made a shocking discovery back in 2004. In the Legislature, he stated, "Mr. Mike Crawley, the president of AIM PowerGen, sent an email in the midst of the bid process to various parties encouraging their attendance at the energy minister's fundraiser at \$5,000 a pop." I might add, Speaker, that AIM PowerGen—now called GDF SUEZ—is located in my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Let me cut to the chase. This government can spin this any way they want—as they always do—but the fact is that this is a safety issue, and I will continue to advocate for the safety of pilots, passengers and community safety. To the government, I say, do the right thing; just move those turbine locations. It's easier to move them on a map than to move them once they're built.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to support my colleague's motion before the House today. I'm so pleased to see so many people who have made the trip here to support Mr. Wilson today. I congratulate him for

the tremendous position of advocacy that he has always taken.

I just want to note that with this airport issue in Collingwood, as with so many other issues surrounding the Green Energy Act and wind turbines and communities, every time communities come up with another reason why it shouldn't proceed, they are thwarted by this government. The game is rigged, Speaker. When the government doesn't like the results of something, they change the rules. The game is rigged so that the people in the communities can't win.

1610

The changes in the act that took away that municipal planning power—the member from Mississauga says, “Would we want to make zoning decisions in this Legislature?” That's exactly what this government did with the Green Energy Act. They took away the rights of municipalities to make the decisions that are in the best interests of their people. Would this project be approved if the people in the area of Collingwood, if their government, were making the decision? I think not, but it is because this government took away that power that this project is proceeding, to the detriment of the economy, to the detriment of the safety of the community and the safety of the pilots.

As a matter of fact, I've heard that if it comes down to a decision, a choice between the turbines and the airport, if the airport can't operate safely with these turbines, then they have to close the airport. Now, what kind of an economic effect would that have on the community? Close the airport, because long after the airport was there, this Liberal government decided they were going to allow somebody to build 500-foot monstrosities that are a detriment to safety in that airport. That's the kind of thinking that is going on because of the blindness of their desire to help their friends in the wind development industry—big fundraisers, big turbines, big mistake.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to get the opportunity to speak for a couple of moments to the member from Simcoe-Grey's motion today. I am a pilot, and I wore my Canadian Owners and Pilots Association wings today with the thought that this was going to be debated.

I first landed at Collingwood airport some 44 years ago on my first cross-country flight, in August 1972. I can tell you that since that time the airport's expanded. It was a shorter runway; now it's a 5,000-foot runway, and it's a busy airport, as we heard, with some 11,000 landings and takeoffs each year. They've also got another runway, a 2,500-foot strip, there as well. To build these 500-foot wind turbines right beside not just one airport, but there's also Stayner airport—I'm looking at the flying map, and they're right beside each other. These turbines are going to be in the operational airspace of these busy airports. That is just a crazy idea, an absolutely crazy idea.

As I said when I had the opportunity to interject a comment in question period, people are going to die. It's

not a question of when or if; there will be an accident. You'll have a VFR pilot, a visual flight rules pilot who is going to be flying in, and there's fog that comes off of Georgian Bay, and low clouds. They're not going to have perfect visibility, and somebody's going to fly into one of those, just like they did in South Dakota. Or you're going to have an instrument flight pilot who is going to be following an approach, may not have it perfectly down; they're going to be a little off-course and they're going to fly into one of these in the clouds.

It's just a really, really bad idea to build these right beside Collingwood airport, not to mention all the other negative effects it's going to have on tourism and on the economy of the area. I hope the government will realize this is just a really bad idea. Just do the right thing and not go ahead with this project, because it's just going to be very, very bad for Collingwood, the province and for the people that are flying the planes that hit the wind turbine.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I wanted to listen very carefully because I know that for many members opposite that this is an issue of great concern, and I have a great deal of respect for the member opposite. I have been sitting in this House with him for six years and I have no doubt of the veracity of his concern or the sincerity of the motion he's put before the House today.

But like the member for Toronto-Danforth, this has to stand on the test of evidence. As the minister who oversees this process, my primary job is to make sure that it is evidence-based, that the proper process was put in place, that the thoroughness and rigor was undertaken by the public servants who do their job, that there was complete independence in their judgment and that there is no interference in the process now that six community members have filed appeals of the director's decision to the Environmental Review Tribunal.

It is my job to make sure that the ERT process is protected. I think it's up to all members of the Legislature to ensure that people are treated on all sides of this debate with fairness and impartiality. Where I take issue with the members opposite is that the last thing that I am prepared to do is politicize the process or insert myself in the process.

Let's just go through what the process is. First of all, with renewable energy projects, we have to ensure that safety is a concern. The member opposite said that Nav Canada didn't have jurisdiction here and there was no approval process. Let me just explain why that might have been something less than accurate. In this case, Nav Canada accepted wpd's land use submission form and stated that they did not object to the proposal as submitted, provided their construction notification requirements are met. In the second approval process, Transport Canada accepted wpd's aeronautical obstruction assessment form and approved the turbines and the turbine lighting plan. That was quite an extensive process.

Not only did the director, when she undertook this, say that she wouldn't do it within the six months; she made

an unprecedented decision to extend the decision-making process and the review for two years, in a process that is normally six months. That's what a public servant with integrity does. If you look at the correspondence and the amount of consultation with experts that she undertook, it is quite remarkable. She also went as far as requiring as a condition that another aeronautical review by expert consultants be undertaken yet again before these turbines could be installed. So there's another process that has to go through, experts—not pilots, not other people, people who fly, but people whose expertise are in the turbine business.

Nav Canada has the authority for all aspects of air traffic control in Canadian air space while under Transport Canada-regulated air space. Nav Canada is also responsible for the distribution of aeronautical information, publications, standards, maps and charts, etc., and they have a major interest in the impacts of new structures on the operations of the electronic systems used in the support of air traffic control responsibilities in their impact on the use of air space. The safety issue was one that I very much take seriously because I used to work in northern—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: I'm going to warn you. The next time I hear you, you'll be named.

I return back to the minister.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: In June 2011, a form was submitted on land use to Nav Canada. On September 11, Nav Canada responded in a land use evaluation letter and assessment of the land use submission form, stating that several turbines were located within the lateral confines of the air space, known as circling areas, of Collingwood Regional Airport. This affected two specific instrument approach procedures.

On March 19, 2013, Nav Canada communicated with the officer of the minister responsible for this, provided an updated land use evaluation letter for wpd. These letters are only valid for 12 months. The letter confirmed that there are no concerns with the turbine layout provided. However, instrument approach procedures adopted by Collingwood Regional Airport required changes, including comments indicating that they would only speak to navigational systems and obstructions. They stated that instrument approaches should be altered to account for the presence of the turbines.

On April 16—this is now the fifth interaction—Nav Canada provides yet another updated land use evaluation letter to wpd. The letter stated that Nav Canada's evaluations and conclusions are based only on the impacts to procedures they maintain and therefore they do not object to the proposal as submitted, provided their construction notification requirements are met.

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Again, on March 19, 2015, Nav Canada provided an updated land use evaluation letter to wpd. The letter noted that the location and the heights—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I am going to warn the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. I've already warned the member from the opposition. This is not a very respectful debate.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Could we stop the clock at least?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Stop the clock. I already said no cross-talk. Okay?

I'm going to warn the member. Next time, you will be named. I am going to return back to the minister.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I won't go through them all, but there were many, many submissions, many revisions of the letter, many reviews of the land use plan, many, many discussions with independent experts and many, many discussions with Nav Canada.

What would this Legislature expect people to do who are independent officers but consult with the experts in the area of authority that covers the jurisdiction? That's what I'm supposed to protect.

One opposition member actually suggested outright—didn't even hint at it and thankfully withdrew the comment—that somehow we're bought and sold as ministers over here, that you have a fundraiser and you buy a vote. Well, it's sweet passing strange to me that that's exactly what they're suggesting. They're saying that we ignore the independent rules and we interfere before the Environmental Review Tribunal has actually heard it. They're actually suggesting that we somehow, by motion of this House, overturn the entire evidence-based process, even before the appeal process has ruled.

Isn't that exactly what money and politics are supposed to be about? Here the Liberal government is standing up and saying, "I don't care who you donate to. I don't care how powerful you are. We are protecting the integrity of the process." In complete contradiction to everything they've said, the party opposite is saying, "No, my local MPP doesn't like it, so throw all the evidence out"—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Simcoe–Grey to wrap up.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Again, thank you to my constituents who are here today and to the pilot experts who are here and all the pilot experts I've heard from, including large commercial pilots from Air Canada. Many of them live in the riding and they go down Airport Road to work. It's unanimous that the experts are saying that these should not be built. I gather, from how you spoke over there, that you don't want to vote for this resolution and at least move the turbines. I'll say to the minister, when he blames this on a director—a director, by the way, who has only been there a few short months. I was a minister—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Can we stop the clock? I already warned both sides: no cross-talk. I want to hear the wrap-up from the member from Simcoe–Grey.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Madam Speaker, on a point of order: I counted. I lost two minutes and 30 seconds of

about a five-minute intervention because of heckling and I asked to have the clock stopped. Madam Speaker—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sit down.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Excuse me.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Go home, you crybaby. Sit down.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Renfrew has already been warned. I already warned the member from Renfrew. So the next time I hear from you again, you will be named. I already warned you. Minister?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: My point was—sorry.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I believe the member from Simcoe–Grey is doing the wrap-up. I respectfully ask everybody to hear this wrapped up so that we can deal with the motions. Okay? I'm going to return back to the member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: As I was saying, Madam Speaker, I was a senior minister for some eight years, and at the end of the day, no matter what arguments and evidence you have or don't have—and by the way, you have zero evidence—you can quote all the correspondence from Nav Canada, but the law is very clear and they don't have a jurisdiction over an airport that is not certified by the federal government. It's a regional airport, including the Stayner aerodrome, or the Clearview Field airport, as it's called.

At the end of the day the buck stops with you as a minister and with the Premier as the head of government. I stepped aside for 10 weeks when one of my assistants said something stupid to a reporter. This is a far bigger issue. You can't tell me the day that someone gets killed or a family crashes into one of these things and gets killed, the reporters are going to go for your director. They're going to go for you and they're going to go for the Premier. They're going to personally blame you.

So, have a heart. Just think of all the experts you've heard from, and the common sense, when these things are just seconds away from takeoff and seconds away before you land, and we're on Georgian Bay, and all the arguments you've heard here and in the past. I say to the minister and the Premier, who is here, you have the chance to do the right thing. Please do the right thing. They're willing to compromise, in terms of the airport authority and my local constituents. Just move them. Why put them between two very, very busy airports?

You've been warned now. Again, when something happens, it's not going to be the bureaucrats that the media and the families will go after; it's going to be you and your government.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Before I start the voting procedure, I just want to remind our visitors that there will be no clapping, shouting or any other disturbance while you're visiting. We welcome all guests, but there will not be any disturbance of the conversation. Thank you.

The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will deal first with ballot item number 33, standing in the name of Mrs. McGarry.

Mrs. McGarry has moved private member's notice of motion number 70. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear "carried." In my opinion, the motion carries. I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Dhillon has moved private member's notice of motion number 71. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear "carried." I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

WIND TURBINES

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Wilson has moved private member's notice of motion number 67. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear a "no."

All those in favour of the motion shall say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion shall say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1627 to 1632.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Members, please take your seats.

Mr. Wilson has moved private member's notice of motion number 67. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert
Coe, Lorne
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hudak, Tim

Jones, Sylvia
Martow, Gila
McDonell, Jim
McNaughton, Monte
Miller, Norm

Munro, Julia
Nicholls, Rick
Thompson, Lisa M.
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anderson, Granville
Baker, Yvan
Ballard, Chris
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bradley, James J.
Chan, Michael
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Damerla, Dipika
De Luca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Dong, Han
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Fraser, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoggarth, Ann
Hoskins, Eric
Hunter, Mitzie
Jaczek, Helena
Kiwala, Sophie
Lalonde, Marie-France
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor

McMeekin, Ted
Milczyn, Peter Z.
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Tabuns, Peter
Thibeault, Glenn
Vernile, Daiene
Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 15; the nays are 43.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Orders of the day?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move to adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): There's a motion to adjourn the House. Does the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, May 2, 2016, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1635.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO**

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, William Short

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Brown, Patrick (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McGarry, Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	
McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint du gouvernement
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	Scarborough–Rouge River	

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Han Dong, Michael Harris
Sophie Kiwala, Arthur Potts
Todd Smith, Monique Taylor
Glenn Thibeault
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

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Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Toby Barrett, Han Dong
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Daiene Vernile
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Monte Kwinter, Marie-France Lalonde
Amrit Mangat, Cristina Martins
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qaadri
Daiene Vernile
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la justice**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
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Randy Hillier, Michael Mantha
Cristina Martins, Indira Naidoo-Harris
Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qaadri
Laurie Scott
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

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Steve Clark, Vic Dhillon
Sophie Kiwala, Michael Mantha
Eleanor McMahon, Monte McNaughton
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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des comptes publics**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Chris Ballard, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Peter Z. Milczyn, Julia Munro
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Joe Dickson, Jennifer K. French
Amrit Mangat, Kathryn McGarry
Indira Naidoo-Harris, Bill Walker
Jeff Yurek
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la politique sociale**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Lorne Coe
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Marie-France Lalonde, Gila Martow
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